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IS THE MOON THE CRADLE OF AN ANCIENT CIVILIZATION?

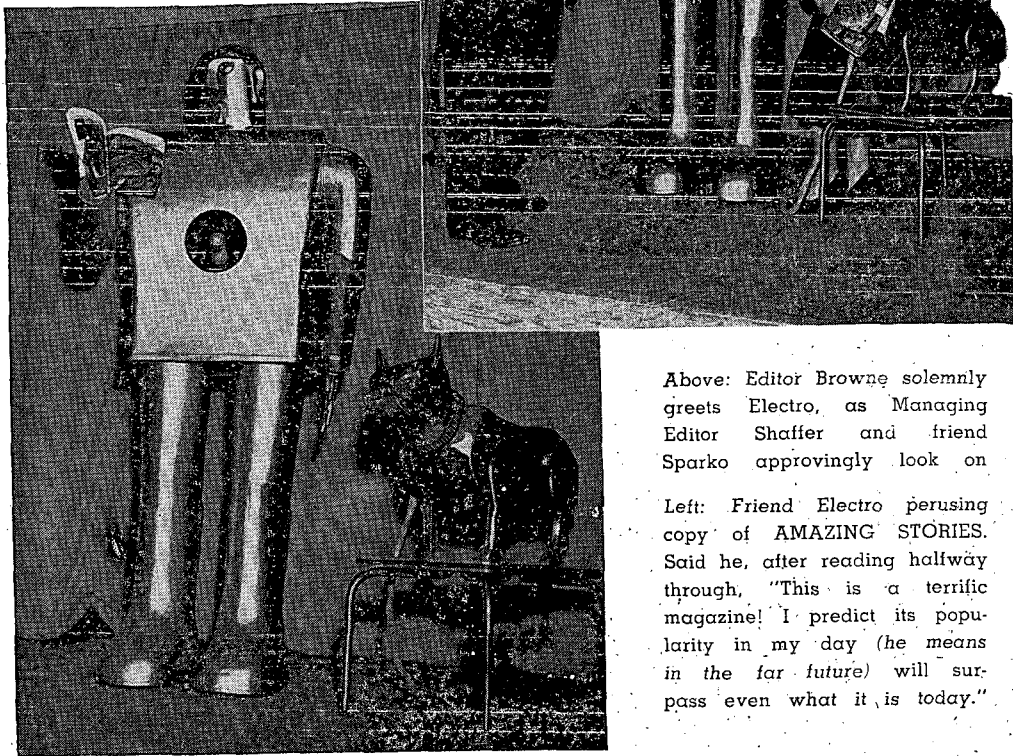
AMAZING STORIES

Once more Gurund Ritroon entered
the Lens to solve the secret of
THE GOLDEN GODS
by JOHN BLOODSTONE



MEN BEHIND AMAZING STORIES

"AMAZING STORIES" EDITORS
CONFER WITH MECHANICAL
MAN ELECTRO REGARDING THE
STATE OF THE FUTURE WORLD



Above: Editor Browne solemnly greets Electro, as Managing Editor Shaffer and friend Sparko approvingly look on

Left: Friend Electro perusing copy of AMAZING STORIES. Said he, after reading halfway through, "This is a terrific magazine! I predict its popularity in my day (he means in the far future) will surpass even what it is today."

THE broad-shouldered, seven-and-a-half-foot-tall Electro stuck out his hand and spoke haltingly: "How do you do." Before your editors had realized this was merely a mechanical man, they had already responded to

the 260-pound metal giant's greeting.

When, recently, your editors were invited to the Litt Brothers Department Store in Philadelphia, to attend a luncheon in honor of Robot

(Continued on page 162)

THE OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

NOW it can be told!

THIS is the day we've been waiting for! Today we write the editorial that has been shaping up inside us since last November; this is the day we can put down the words that, when you read them, will make you no less excited than your editors themselves!

NEXT month (on March 21st, to be exact) a NEW and EXCITING kind of science-fiction and fantasy magazine will appear on the newsstands. It will be a Ziff-Davis publication...and they don't come any better than that—nor as good, for that matter! To get the cold statistics out of the way first, it will be digest-sized, contain 162 pages and sell for thirty-five cents. That, as we said, is the cold part; from now on the news warms up!

NOWADAYS, with everything from artichokes to zwieback being gilded with fat adjectives to sell the goods, you can't blame John Q. Public for giving the cynical eye to extravagant claims. So we'll make our bid on the basis of fact instead of fan-fare.

FIRST—the name of the new magazine. One word. FANTASTIC. Short, sweet, and to the point! FANTASTIC. Remember it, look for it, ask for it, buy it! No matter what your tastes in fiction are, you'll like FANTASTIC. We've spared no expense, we've burned the midnight oil, we've read literally millions of words, we've talked ourselves hoarse with authors and artists—and we've come up with the first truly great science-fiction and fantasy magazine since the old aristocrat *Amazing Stories* began its sensational career more than a quarter century ago.

NEXT—the covers. The front cover will be in six colors—a magnificent fantasy painting by Barye Phillips, whose work has appeared on the dust jackets of best-selling novels. Three times this cover was done over before we were completely satisfied—and the result is something that will grab your imagination by the throat! ...As for the back cover—here is the real

scoop! A full-color reproduction of an acknowledged masterpiece of fantasy! The original hangs in the Museum of Modern Art, here in New York City, and we assigned Frank Lerner, the man who made the color shots of the Sistine Chapel which appeared in *Life Magazine* a few months ago, to make the Ektachrome from which our plates were made.

BUT all this is just the window dressing—although a mighty sweet job of it!—for what you want in a magazine: the stories. And right here is where we get downright smug—knowing full well there's nothing a reader likes better than to clip a smug editor on the chin! We're sure, however, that you'll find your right eyebrow climbing into your hairline with delighted surprise when you learn the names of the authors in the first issue of FANTASTIC—authors who wrote these stories expressly for us, and who gave everything they had in professional ability to make their work the best they could do.

WHO are these authors? Well, in the first issue you'll find Ray Bradbury with as fine a piece of writing as he's ever done—and they don't come finer than that! Also, H. L. Gold—that's right!—the editor of *Galaey*, and a real master of fantasy, as those of you who remember *Unknown* will recall. Isaac Asimov will rock you with his best yarn in the past five years; Kris Neville fitted together a memorable short story that you'll be running across in anthologies for years to come; Walter Miller Jr., with a pure science-fiction novellette that has more out-and-out suspense in it than almost anything we've ever read. A featured article by Willy Ley takes care of the fact element of FANTASTIC; and there are other stories by writers of the same imposing stature as those we've mentioned.

THE big news we've saved for our closing paragraph—and here it is. FANTASTIC will feature in the first issue a short fantasy novel by no less than Raymond Chandler—one of the truly fine craftsmen in today's American literature.... March 21st is the date; reserve your copy at your newsstand today! —HB



APRIL, 1952

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— All STORIES Complete —

THE GOLDEN GODS (Short novel—30,000) by John Bloodstone..... 6

Illustrated by Paul Lundy

Flannigan was dead and buried and the girl who loved him wept at his grave—not knowing he was a universe away fighting for the life and love of another woman!

THE MAN WHO BOUGHT TOMORROW (Novelette—15,000) by William P. McGivern..... 60

Illustrated by David Stone

Don't ever call Reggie stupid. Why, when this lovely girl practically threw herself into his arms, he took her to his apartment and got out his electric trains.

BATTLE OF THE HOWLING HATCHET (Short—10,000) by Don Wilcox..... 86

Illustrated by Ed. Valigursky

Bill Barth fell asleep—and woke as Steve Sanders. Even worse, he found himself at the controls of a monster machine that was boring into the center of the Earth.

MURDER ON MARS (Novelette—10,000) by Frances M. Deegan..... 104

Illustrated by Ed. Valigursky

Robbery was going on in the world of angels and honest men. Only, what could be crooked about stealing worthless stones and leaving valuable gems in their place?

THE DOG WITH THE WEIRD TALE (Short—4,500) by Paul W. Fairman..... 124

Illustrated by Leo Ramon Summers

Tom married Myra when her first husband proved to be a dog of a man. But with Myra he got her pet collie—and the collie turned out to be a man of a dog!

MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE—I (Short—5,000) Author Unknown..... 134

Illustrated by Ed. Valigursky

Recently we told of a history of the future found off the coast of Spain. Your letters demanded that we publish it—so here is the first documented installment.

Front cover painting by Barye Phillips, illustrating
a scene from the story "The Golden Gods"

CONTRIBUTIONS: Contributors are advised to retain a copy of their manuscripts and illustrations. Contributions should be mailed to the New York Editorial Office and must be accompanied by return postage. Contributions will be handled with reasonable care, but this magazine assumes no responsibility for their safety. Any copy accepted is subject to whatever adaptations and revisions are necessary to meet the requirements of this publication. Payment covers all author's, contributor's and contestant's rights, title, and interest in and to the material accepted and will be made at our current rates upon acceptance. All photos and drawings will be considered as part of the material purchased.

The Golden Gods

By John Bloodstone



They stared in horror as men, mounts, even the landscape, disintegrated under the powerful beams



Here's John Flannigan: back to battle the monsters of a hidden universe! A great sequel to "Land Beyond the Lens"

THEY LET Louise take a last look at the strange, haunted man she had loved. Or, rather, at his coffin.

The eyepiece of the telescope seemed to be as cold as the apathetic void into which she gazed. There the battered rocket was, where they had said, in the center of the lower right quadrant, apparently just another low

magnitude star, poised motionlessly alongside the blindingly bright disc of the moon.

"We lost contact with him three hours ago," explained Doctor Hendricks. "It was an abrupt break in perfect transmission, and we can only conclude that either his transmitter was damaged, or the ship itself was demolished."

"By a meteor you mean, don't you, Doctor?" one of the reporters asked.

"Yes. That's one of the chief reasons why no further attempts will be made to send man-carrying rockets into space for perhaps a generation to come, until science devises a better means of protection than radar course correction. Space is filled with a veritable celestial flak, at least at this comparatively close proximity to the sun. Each star, you know, is a giant magnet, so to speak, and all the cosmic debris from outlying regions..."

HE WENT on, but Louise did not hear the rest. She was thinking of Michael Flannigan, once so young and strong, renowned test pilot and Doctor of Science, his body now riddled with hard radiations, sterile, perhaps dead, or struggling for air in a leaking, crippled ship, clinging to life in the certainty of death. Plunging to destruction on the surface of an airless, empty world where Man's feet would not tread for yet another score of years, if ever again.

She thought: if he had died of the moon's radioactive poisoning, like her father and Deegan—or if he had been obliterated by a meteor while out in his space suit, like Gilbert—she might have been able to adjust herself to her grief more normally, like the two young widows of these fine men who had been lost on the previous expedition. If she had only had a chance to marry him and know his love for just a little while, it would not be a tragedy

such as this with its lingering and poignant torment.

She choked back a sob and tried to see through the moisture in her eyes. All Michael's life an indefinable urge had driven him onward, excluding her from his inner life even when the normal man in him had reached out to her. He had reached for her, and she for him, but as in some incomprehensible dream of futility they had not managed to touch—really.

Then his ambition had been realized: the first expedition to the moon. Why he had not died like the others she could only conjecture, and those conjectures led to madness, so she did not dare to dwell on the reason for it.

But for that same reason he had insisted on a second try, in the same ship of death that his expert guidance had returned to Earth. They had wanted more readings and they had put up the money for repairs and fuel—for a one-way trip—because they knew he had only days to live anyway, in his condition.

What made it especially bad for her was that she alone knew he was insane. That's why he had refused to die on Earth, succumbing to the inevitable, like her father. It was a consuming madness that had driven him back into the merciless clutches of the resentful and jealous void.

She knew what Michael Flannigan *thought* he was after. For to her alone he had told his insane story.

He claimed he had been predestined to find the *Lens*, gateway to a lost universe in another time, hidden for eons within a crater on the moon. While some seventy hours had passed on the outside, he had spent months *beyond* the *Lens*, transformed into something inhuman, a long-awaited god-man—Gurund Ritroon, Son of Gur, the Avenger. And there he had loved above all other women a mythical queen, Mnir'sr Nikinra.

He had sworn to Louise that he had saved a nation of people from their ancient enemies and fulfilled an ancient prophecy, that he had to return to his lost love before she chose to walk alone in Zi'lgar-lon, the Desert of Death, and give herself to eternal sleep.

To whom could she repeat such a madman's dream? It was sheer delirium....

LOUISE SHOOK her head and surreptitiously slipped away from the group of scientists and reporters, dabbing at her eyes with a tiny handkerchief. Her car was outside. What she needed was the long drive back home alone under the moon.

"Miss Daren!"

One of the reporters had followed her to the parking area. It was cold up here on Mount Palomar. She could see the other's breath condensing in the air. A bone-chilling wind had begun to blow and she was impatient to be gone.

"Yes?" she said tonelessly.

"I just wanted to say how sorry we all are—"

"And squeeze some more story out of me," she snapped irritably. "Well, I wish you'd leave me alone now. I've cooperated enough."

As she turned to get into the car, he detained her, firmly but not roughly.

"I assure you I understand," he said, "but there's something important I want to clear up."

"Important?" She paused to look at the twin moons reflected by the other's spectacles.

"Didn't your father tell you, before he passed away, that on the first trip out they all had a fight with Flannigan?"

"Yes. They wanted to turn back when they learned about the bad radiation effects in outer space, and on

account of the meteors, but he insisted on going on."

"What I'm getting at is this: didn't you say that they had to strike him with a heavy wrench or something—that it made a big gash in his head?"

The reporter thought he saw her stiffen suddenly. Her face was noticeably pale in the semi-darkness.

"No," she answered. "If I said that I was only adding my own impression. I—I was too upset at the press hearing."

"But I know you said they struck him with a wrench. You see, this point is important, because—"

"Because photographs taken of him after his return reveal that he bore no such scar on his head," she interrupted. "That alone should prove to you I was wrong about the gash. I'm sorry. I can't add any more to the story. It's cold and I don't feel well. Good night!"

LATER, ON the lonely road down the mountain, her pulse roared in her ears like the cold wind against the windshield. *Her father had described that gash in detail!* He had said it was a bloody mess, and he had thought they had killed him. But then Flannigan had broken out of his bunk under ten gravs of deceleration and taken over the controls again, filled with a superhuman strength.

It was after that, she recalled, that Flannigan said he had gone through the Lens to play the role of godling in a faery universe! Her car swerved on the road and she had to slow to a stop and sit there staring at the moon.

Had the Lens healed every wound, as he claimed? That would account for the absence of an ugly scar on his forehead. And it would also account for his having endured the moon's radioactive poisoning. What he was infected with before his metamorpho-

sis in the Lens, had been cleansed. Only after coming back had he been infected, which would thus have amounted to half as much as for the others!

The wind screeched around her parked car while ragged, silver-edged clouds raced above the waving trees and across the moon. The night seemed suddenly upside down and she hung from the bottom of the world, about to fall into the endlessness of space. The wind was like something out of the starry abyss, seeking to pluck her into Eternity. She grew giddy with a sense of agoraphobia and clutched at the steering wheel for balance and reassurance.

She shook her head, trying to regain a foothold in the rational world of her own Terra Firma. It was all so insane. There could be no Lens. No hidden universe.

But the thought assailed her again, as it had back there along the highway, that there *was* such a thing as the Land of the Lens, and she wondered, in spite of herself, if Flannigan would make it, after all. And if he returned there, would it be as god or man? If he were too late and Mnir'sr Nikinra had already gone to Zi'ilgarlon, would he follow her?

Into her mind crept a vision of a lonely, bewhiskered space pilot, his eyes glued to his periscope, desperately maneuvering a badly battered and leaking ship toward his goal, beyond Serenitatis, over the lunar Appenines, lower still, hurtling across Eratos-thenes, onward toward broad Copernicus and Mare Imbrium—toward the towering enigma that was Rheingold, the ultimate answer to life or death.

"Michael! Michael!" she sobbed. "May God preserve you."

She sat there crying bitterly while the wind howled and the moon sank out of sight below the far, far horizon....

CHAPTER II

Or Oblivion

FOR HOURS after encountering the meteor barrage, Flannigan had worked in the absolute darkness of his airless control room, suffering the prolonged discomfort of a space suit. Oxygen did not worry him. There were extra tanks, plenty of them—like a banquet for the damned before the execution. They knew he could never return.

But the landing was what bothered him. His ship was full of holes. He had the decelerators, but half his navigating batteries were out of control and he knew he could not maneuver a vertical descent as before. It would have to be a bellyflop at nearly four hundred miles an hour. Where on the moon could he make such a landing without killing himself?

He was breathing hard inside his space helmet. A nerve-searing fire consumed his mind and strength. It was already time for death, but out here where no one could know Death's secrets he was borrowing extra time. For until he reached the Lens again he refused to die.

He was close in now, and the jagged, seven-mile-high peaks of the Appenines reached out like titanic claws as though determined to detain him from his forbidden purpose. Forbidden it might be to twist the warp of Fate, for this return of his was not predestined. The prophecy was done. The power of the Lens had returned to another slumber of the ages. The god-strength was gone from him. He was returning on his own, for very personal reasons.

The vision of Mnir'sr Nikinra floated into his fevered mind as she had come to him that magical night on the shores of Ces'son Nar in that other land beyond the Lens. Beneath the

golden and purple moons, Lan Ba'na and Ral, she had come wearing white flowers in her incredible hair, her perfect feet, like those of a miniature pink porcelain gazelle, running toward him.

*She whose eyes were like the dawn
Where night embraces day...
She who sings no more of me,
Who walks into Eternity
Taking only memory
Of love, like blossoms, withered...*

The haunting song came back to him and filled him with a fever of life that challenged every force of Nature that sought to keep him from her. It was a song out of the ages, that belonged to her—and to him!

Tears of desperation filled his eyes, blurring his vision at the most crucial moment. He had the impression of crashing as he saw, in the periscope, a jagged cliff come hurtling at him.

But there was only a sharp "ping" as the rocket chipped its top and plunged onward, with white-hot decelerators blazing their last. He was sure it must have been either Eratosthenes or Copernicus. Then dead ahead lay the Mare Imbrium—and Rheingold!

He yelled with all the power in his lungs in order to sharpen his senses and to relieve the horrible pains of radioactive burning inside him, and he gripped the controls in a blind frenzy of renewed determination, while his life flickered uncertainly between the irresistible force of his momentum and the immovable object of the moon, itself.

In a small fraction of a second he maneuvered to one side of Rheingold and bellyflopped onto the Mare Imbrium. Which turned out to be an ocean, after all.

An ocean of impalpable dust, on which he planed for miles. Clouds of

it rose behind him, only to fall abruptly to rest for lack of an atmosphere to suspend them.

At last the ship came swirling to a halt, far out in that waterless sea, while the naked stars looked down at this additional piece of flotsam deposited by the endless tides of Time—in a place beyond desolation, alien to Heaven and to Hell, without sound or motion—save for the occasional dust explosions where meteors struck....

IT WAS very easy for Flannigan to lose all sense of time, out there in his space suit wading through the interminable cosmic dust that covered the Mare Imbrium. His only clock was his oxygen supply, four hours for each tank. And he had changed two tanks, with only four spares left to go.

But sometimes he forgot about the oxygen, and his struggle seemed to take place neither in the world of the living nor that of the dead, but in a timeless Limbo, where exertion, pain and vertigo were personified into relentless demons impeding him and changing his body into clay. He was laboring under one-sixth of Earth's gravity, but carrying five-hundred Earth pounds of equipment, and now it seemed he was even carrying the moon.

Under the direct rays of the rising sun, the temperature was rising in his suit, in spite of refrigeration. Soon it would be above boiling temperature outside, and inside he could expect heat in excess of 110 degrees Fahrenheit. This would rise as his batteries grew weaker.

Five times his metal hood had been struck by small meteors, knocking him flat beneath the surface of the dust. A large blow would obliterate him.

And in the meantime, the radioactivity of the moon assailed him, in-

creasing his life-consuming fever.

Under any other circumstances, Flannigan knew he would have succumbed. But desperation mingled with an Irish temper kept the vision of Rheingold crater clear in his blood-shot eyes. He had increased the polarization of his vision panel almost to opacity, but Rheingold's towering wall still glared through.

Hell would have been easier to traverse, he thought, pressing within his metal mitt the siphon bulb that brought precious water through a tube to his parched lips and at the same time sprayed his perspiring face. In his left ear he heard the Geiger clicking louder. Though it meant greater proximity to death, it also meant he was closer to his goal. It was the craters that produced most of the radioactive disturbance, and Rheingold was a crater.

Rheingold—home of the Lens. Up over the great wall, down inside, into that dark cavern he had found. He knew he would not lose the way even in his fevered delirium, for he had traversed that path a thousand times in his dreams. Just as he had fought, again and again, with the ancient enemies of the red-skinned Serin Ni, with the green men, across the Barrier Sea, in Bidjar Tan. True to his predestined mission, he had saved the red men from destruction and given them the power to maintain peace.

Or had he?

As his mind staggered between consciousness and oblivion, a clear picture returned to him of his last moments there in the secret land he sought, during the last invasion of Serin Tan by the green men....

HE WAS AWARE of four suns above him, of a sky filled with flaming death, of ships blasting into pieces of wood and men, sails rising

in flames from the fire brands and the rocket bombs, which were his own invention. And he, Gurund Ritroon the Avenger, was dying from his battle wounds.

Mnir'ra stood there beside him, feeling with him the imminence of death as the hard-driving enemy ships closed in around them. But death seemed not unwelcome to her. She kneeled suddenly and pressed her face against his brow. She kissed him and whispered that he could not die without her.

"If you die," she whispered, "I will walk in Zi'ilgar-lon alone. I will follow Altinra into the sleep of forever, for I cannot live with only the memory of you!"

He caressed her, in spite of his pain, and he kissed her mouth, her throat, and her breast.

"I've sought you for a million years," he gasped, "but now I may lose you, I may be taken back through the Lens. If the Lens takes me—" Pain stopped his voice.

"If the Lens takes you, you will try to return," she said. "You must promise!"

"But maybe I can't!" he protested. "The Lens—"

"I shall wait," she said. "A hundred Purple Moons I shall wait—if you go. After that I shall walk where Altinra walked, in Zi'ilgar-lon..."

Then she straightened up, vividly aware of a ship next to hers and of a green man with horrible scars marking his face. He stood on the bridge with a captured Serin Ni crossbow in his powerful hands—the improved weapon which the Avenger had given her people. Its metal-barbed arrow was aimed at her heart.

Gon'ri the warrior, their greatest enemy, smiled triumph and glare-l hatred simultaneously. And Mnir'sr Nikinra stood unyieldingly where she was, a perfect target.

But just then both ships struck an-

other invention of the Avenger—a floating mine. The blast knocked them ponderously apart, tearing up planking and rigging and dumping green men into the sea.

He was in the water. He saw Mnir'ra swimming like a mermaid, and he remembered with a great sense of relief that she was one of Gra'ghr's greatest swimmers. But his body density was carrying him swiftly downward.

And he thought, even if she dies, Serin Gor will be safe under the guidance of her brother, Djikn Kinri, who even now manned the shore defenses of his country.

His perspective became confused. Was he hurtling through water—or endless space?

HOW FLANNIGAN climbed Rheingold he never knew. But he was there, on the rim, with his two last oxygen tanks running low. Almost twenty incredible hours had passed since he had landed.

Once in a while a very tiny meteoric particle pinged against his hood, but outside of that he was surrounded by the cloying, almost tangible stillness of interplanetary space. He paused only once to look for his useless ship far out on the Mare Imbrium. But his eyes were too weak; he was almost blind.

He could make out the great globe of the Earth above him, but he was not assailed with the nostalgic memories of an Earthman, as before when he had stood in this spot. He was no longer of Earth. The bridge of space was burned to ashes. There was no way back.

He turned and staggered through the ageless rubble of the downward path inside the crater. Pain had passed from his body, like hunger long unattended. It was too late for pain. It was as though his body had died and

only his spirit carried him.

An eternity later, it seemed, in a low-roofed cavern, he found the Lens. But it was no longer aglow with the old power that it had exerted over his life. It was like a huge, dull diamond, half embedded in a wall of frozen lava.

As he approached, his steps faltered, and finally he fell to the ground, his senses reeling. With his goal achieved, his strength failed him. He grasped for one last shred of life and could not find it.

Within the Lens lay life and a world that was more to him than Heaven. But the Lens seemed cold to him, a dead substance, unaware of his desperate extremity.

What was there to receive him now, he thought, as he died. In this place there could be neither Heaven nor Hell. There was either the Lens—or ultimate oblivion....

CHAPTER III

Fate So Cold

HOW MANY hours, days, years or eons passed, Flannigan had no way of knowing, but he knew that his total consciousness had been enveloped in a stillness beside which the soundlessness of space was a deafening crescendo of cosmic cymbals, the thunderous crashing of the twin forces of construction and destruction, the titanic reverberation of Creation.

But then, dimly, he became aware of distant voices, speaking in a language which was absolutely foreign to him—yet totally familiar! A trembling pulse of excitement ran through him, a wave of triumph almost overwhelming to his tortured senses.

It was the language of the planet Gra'ghr—Land of the Lens!

Then black fear assailed him. It

might be delirium—a last torturing, false shred of hope flickering in his brain before death claimed him forever.

The voices grew more distinct: "He must not die," someone was saying. "We need him more than ever now."

Yes, he thought. Perhaps they still did need him. Perhaps that was why the Lens was bringing him back....

He was aware of the wild beating of his heart. To be again in that wonderful land and fight again beside Djikn Kinri the Hunter, King of the Serin Ni! To return to Mnir'ra the Singer and hold her beloved form in his arms once more!

And if Gon'ri the Warrior, emperor of the green men, had survived, somehow, to continue his cruel war of domination, he would kill him this time with his own hands, and peace at last would come to Gra'ghr!

Inspired by his elation, he made a supreme effort to get hold of himself. And suddenly he sat up, fully conscious.

To his chagrin, however, he saw before him a half dozen glistening, hairless green men, fully armed, except for one who wore on his forehead the jeweled insignia of the priesthood. He was a medical priest of Zich'yeh, the God of Destiny of the green men.

Flannigan observed that he was in a low-ceilinged room built of gray granite blocks, which gave him an unmistakable clue to his location. He was somewhere in Inis'dur, capital city of Bidjar Tan, in the country of the enemy.

So he had not drowned, after all. They had picked him up and carried him back here, possibly as a hostage.

The fools! Hadn't they had enough of Gurund Ritroon the Avenger? As a god he would destroy them now as he had before. He would return to Serin Gor and discover the fate of

Mnir'ra. This was all that mattered—except perhaps to find Gon'ri the Warrior, if he still lived, and crush his evil skull.

It was all a brave and exhilarating thought, but it was invalid. He suddenly became aware of this fact when he saw his body and his powerful arms and hands.

They were as shiny and green as those of his companions!

SHARPLY in the wake of this revelation came the memory of those words he had heard: "He must not die. We need him more than ever now."

Surely no green man would speak thus of his archenemy, such as he had been in the past. Who was he, then? What was this horrifying camouflage? Surely Fate could not have been ironical enough to—

"Gon'ri!" exclaimed the battle-scarred warlords in the room. "You live!"

"Bidjar Tan is still safe!" added one of them, kissing the naked blade of his stone dagger in sacred salute.

The priest turned on them, glowering reproachfully. "Are you of so little faith?" he said. "Go thank Zich'yeh and bring tribute to the temple. For He alone has saved the Emperor when he was as one already dead!"

"You can save such speeches for the services, Karj'ri," said one of the warlords. "You don't have to wear that priest's mask in here. What has saved Gon'ri was a good heart and muscles and cartilage. Without them that assassin's arrow would have done its work for sure. The important point before us now is that Djikn Kinri is building up a new invasion fleet and we need Gon'ri's strong hand here."

Karj'ri, High Priest of Zich'yeh, drew his wizened little frame to its full height and tried to stare the warlords down. "When you speak with

such blasphemous disrespect for your god and your religion," he said, "you stand close to the block of sacrifices."

For answer, the muscular warlord he had threatened leapt across the room and grasped the priest by the throat.

"We've had enough of this inquisition of the priesthood!" he bellowed. "Just remember that the leader of the insurrection is a priest. Nr'im Kun'ri, one of your own priests, was responsible for this assassination attempt. So don't talk too bravely, or the Military will start its own inquisition!"

At that crucial moment in the very long life of the High Priest, Gon'ri the Warrior suddenly amazed everybody in the room. He groaned so miserably that all who heard him thought he was about to die. Then he leapt to his feet and dashed out of the room.

In the stone corridor outside, many other armed green men hailed him with shouts of relief and tried to detain him. But he asked them to leave him alone and, weak as he was from loss of blood, he climbed a great staircase.

Upward, anywhere—to be alone with his thoughts. Thoughts so terrible that his stomach gripped him with nausea and his mouth turned bitter.

At last he found a lonely window that looked out at the somber cliffs behind the city. He stood there with his fists clenched until the knuckles showed white.

Better it would be to be dead than to have been reincarnated in this particular body, imprisoned in it forever as Gon'sr Lit'ri, to live in this hard-won, cherished world as the greatest enemy of his friends, the red-skinned Serin Ni! As Gon'ri the warrior he was Djikn Kinri's mortal enemy, and to Mnir'ra the most despicable man alive!

And more than this, his face was repulsive. As a result of the acid which

Zrand'ri, High Priest of Gur, had hurled at Gon'ri on that long-gone day when the green men had first invaded Serin Gor, his face was scarred out of shape and one eye had been removed by surgery. The other stared horribly from lidless scar tissue. He was hideous to behold—a magnificent specimen of manhood, admittedly, but wearing the face of a monster!

Part of Mnir'ra's love song came back to him at that moment:

*Why, my love, is fate so cold,
To fill the heart in vain,
Giving today to have and hold,
Only to lose again!*

HE BOWED his head and shook it to clear his mind of numbing shock. He even wondered if he could maintain his sanity.

Desperately, he gripped the cold flagstone of the windowsill and tried to think. First of all, he was Gurund Ritroon no longer. The god-man, energized with superman strength by the Lens, was no more. He was still physically the most powerful man on the planet, but he was *only* a man. Furthermore, since it appeared that the forces of the green men were divided by internal revolt and Djikn Kinri constituted a powerful threat to their chances for survival, this was proof that he had already accomplished his mission here. And inasmuch as he could never reveal his true identity to Mnir'ra or hope to know her love again, what was the use of coming back?

Perhaps he could assist the Serin Ni from behind the lines. As Emperor of the Bidjar Ri, perhaps he could give his own subjects a classic example of sabotage and make sure that the red men would win. What else could he do? Back there on the moon his own body lay fatally infected with radioactivity, oxygen exhausted, and his ship demolished. There would be ~~no~~

further lunar expeditions for at least another generation. There was no returning in that direction, even if he knew how to pass through the Lens at will. And in this land what was there left but some bitter form of self-sacrifice for the sake of his friends? He wanted to accomplish it and be done with it.

But to help them he would have to conceal his true identity from everyone, for if the green men knew that the ghost of the Avenger wore the body of their chieftain, the outcome would be inevitable. He would be laid open on the bloody altar of Zich'yeh, the God of Destiny.

Ironical, indeed!

"Sire, I would speak with you a moment."

He turned to discover Karj'ri, the High Priest, standing behind him. The old man, who was evilly wise with twice ten thousand years of age, shook visibly with emotion.

"Tonight, sire, when Xlar'nr Mar-na'ri dared to lay his hands in violence on my sacred person, a new scroll was illuminated in the long history of Gra'ghr. True, he is your most powerful and—I should add—your most dangerous ally. Admittedly, he is the most powerful chieftain of the savage Ddjar Li tribes." The old priest's eyes blazed. "But he is a green man! As such he should remember that the penalty for violating the person of a High Priest is death! I suppose, however, that in these perilous days it would be greatly to our detriment to exact this punishment, even if we could get away with it, what with his barbarians half filling the city. In fact, such an act would inevitably precipitate a violent war between the green men, and we would be so weakened by it as a race that the accursed red men would be able to take us. So play your politics if you will, sire, for the underground movement led by Nr'im Kun'ri is

enough of a headache in itself. You cannot add more to your burdens."

Flannigan was impatient with his visitor. His chest wound from the assassin's arrow was painning him. He was weak and wanted to be left alone for a while longer before going back to his couch to recuperate.

"Well, speak up!" he snapped. "What are you getting at?"

Karj'ri narrowed his eyes, looking behind him before he spoke, to make sure they were alone. He made some sort of sacred sign over his forehead, with what was intended to be impressive ceremony.

"I would speak of the *Secret Gods*", he said, pausing for effect.

Fortunately, it was difficult for anyone to read the thoughts of Gon'ri the Warrior in his mutilated face, so his failure to react properly to this announcement could not be detected. He only stared back with his one, gruesome eye, remaining discreetly silent. He had never heard of the "*Secret Gods*".

"I speak to you of this because, since ancient times—since before the Cataclysm and our imprisonment within the Lens—this sacred knowledge has remained only with the upper priesthood and with our emperors. It was written, in those past ages, that if the priesthood or the emperor or the race were violated or endangered, and there were no other recourse, we should turn to the Secret Gods. Sire, I say to you that all of these conditions have been established. It is time to turn to our last and only recourse, dangerous as that may be. Since the coming of Gurund Ritroon among the Serin Ni, our very existence as a race has become endangered. True, we have been able to steal or copy their new weapons, such as crossbows and rocket bombs and metal shields, but they still endanger us because of the perseverance, leadership and aggressiveness of

Djikh Kinri. Our own ranks have been shaken to the roots by internal strife, and an attempt has even been made to assassinate you. Nr'im Kun'ri is gathering enemies against you, and Xlar'nr Marna'ri but slightly holds the reins on his thousands of yelling savages, waiting for the slightest pretext to release them. To top it all off, he has violated my own person—me, High Priest of the High God, Zich'yeh! I tell you the time has come at last—"And Nr'im Kun'ri?" queried Flannigan. "Do you think the same thought will occur to him, to turn to the Secret Gods?"

"Perhaps," said Karj'ri. "I have even been thinking that all of us, you and I and the entire priesthood, should turn the tables and go with Nr'im Kun'ri. All of us should turn to the Secret Gods and reassert ourselves once and for all. They will give us back our ancient power, and none will be able to stand in our way!"

Flannigan was impatient of all this superstitious nonsense. Furthermore, he saw an excellent opportunity to add to the disunity of the green men and still play his role safely.

"I am still your major recourse," he said imperiously. "I am still the Law, Karj'ri. And I shall decide on that point. In the meantime, I shall begin a purge. The underground must be destroyed and our ranks must be unified."

What he meant was that he would kill as many important green leaders as possible. Which was a measure designed to undermine the nation and add further fuel to the rising flames of insurrection. Bidjar Tan had to be softened up for Djikh Kinri's threatened invasion.

CHAPTER IV

Boomerang

ONCE BACK on his couch, Flannigan found that in times of grave

international tension it was not the privilege of an emperor to rest or sleep—convalescent or otherwise. The affairs of state were far too pressing to be ignored; so vital, in fact, that it was tacitly understood his health would have to be jeopardized. He was allowed to sleep only a few hours at a time, which was just as well, he thought, for his dreams were only nightmares in which he saw himself exactly as he was—as Gon'ri the Warrior. Only now he felt that the title should be changed to Gon'ri the Horrible.

But he learned many things. Among them was the reason for the assassination attempt. It was the result partially of an unpopular foreign policy. Most of the nation felt that the Bidjar Ri had held back long enough; that they were fully prepared to strike against Djikh Kinri. Three hundred great ships and fifty thousand warriors with improved armaments were ready. From time immemorial the green men had disdained to even consider the Serin Ni as worthy antagonists.

The surprise resistance the red men had given them had been only that—a momentary surprise. Now, the green men had copied many of the new weapons given to Djikh Kinri by Gurund Ritroon and they felt they were more than ready, for Serin Gor was a small nation and it was outnumbered. But Gon'ri had led the two unsuccessful invasions, and he knew the strength of his enemy and the surprising resourcefulness and determination of Djikh Kinri, King of the Serin Ni. He had adopted the policy of waiting to have them within range of his shore batteries so that he could cover his own fleets with a protective barrage. However, any policy of waiting was anathema to the proud Bidjar Ri and the ferocious Djar Li savages from the desert country.

Close upon the development of this situation another factor had soon been added: It had been a diplomatic necessity to enlist as allies the total forces of all the Djar Li tribal chieftains, and to do this in a reliable manner he had to deal directly with his greatest potential enemy and possible contender for the imperial throne itself—Xlar'nr Marna'ri, the second most powerful green man on the planet. In a way, the treaty they had made relieved the tension, because it bound them militarily against a common foe. However, Xlar'ri the Strong, as he was more popularly known, soon adopted the capital city of Inis'dur as his military headquarters, and as a consequence many thousands of his tattooed and painted warriors turned the place into a brawling camp. By nature they were restless, cruel, and quick to fight. They stole Bidjar Ri women and laughed at the local citizenry's more personal gods, even violating the lesser temples in some cases.

Naturally, the malcontents among the local inhabitants had finally appealed to that other great power—the Priesthood. And Nr'im Kun'ri, second high Priest of Zich'yeh, had conveniently received a "divine inspiration" to rescue the Chosen Children of the Gods from anarchy. He had established the underground and inspired the assassination of Gon'ri the Warrior. Now his forces were scattered through the hills indulging in guerrilla warfare against all other green men. And at the same time they were not unsuccessful in gathering new recruits.

Flannigan saw all this as a convenient circumstance, favorable to the military fortunes of his friends, the Serin Ni. As a natural deduction, he perceived that his next step should be to weaken the already crumbling structure of the treaty which bound the Djar Li to the Bidjar Ri. And the

best way to do this was for him to work on Xlar'nr Marna'ri.

HIS FIRST move was to antagonize him indirectly. Assembling a number of rather innocuous reports from Intelligence, he soon gathered enough circumstantial evidence, though not entirely hole-proof, to accuse one of the higher Djar Li officers of conspiracy. Actually, all the man had done was to go hunting in the hill country, but incriminatingly deep into Nr'im Kun'ri's guerrilla territory. Without giving him a trial before a joint power court, as was prescribed by the new military code, he had caused the supposed offender to be surrendered to the tender mercies of the sacrificial priests, who had used him quickly before the order could be countermanded.

His planned purge was on, and the trap sprang. Xlar'nr Marna'ri did not even ask for an audience. He came storming into the Emperor's bedchamber, glistening magnificently in the sweat of his indignation and rage.

"What are you trying to do?" he bellowed. "Start a war?"

Gon'ri the Warrior had a reputation for never having been known to smile, but at that moment he almost forgot himself, because Flannigan was thinking: You're damn right I am!

But he frowned and straightened up in his bed. He still wore the golden bands which Gon'ri had been proud to keep around his prodigious biceps, held there only by the size of his muscles. His arms tensed and the gold bands straightened rigidly into place—a famous sign of hostility. Meanwhile, his guards brought their spears to the ready position, across their chests.

And he said to Xlar'ri, "Do not ever enter my presence again without being properly announced!"

Xlar'ri the Strong, however, only fed his anger on this reaction. "We'll

dispense with the formalities!" he retorted. "I not only demand an explanation of this outrage.—I'll have compensation for it!"

Flannigan glared at him. "We will *not* dispense with the formalities. There has been no outrage other than the duplicity of your own officer. And I am pleased to draw your attention to this matter as another proof that I, alone, am the Law here. Once we come to an understanding on that point, we'll be able to get ahead with the business of unification. You seem to forget that we have a major war on our hands!"

Xlar'ri's great chest expanded under the pressure of suppressed rage; and his black eyes flared up murderously. One muscular hand even touched the hilt of his dagger, but two of the imperial guards stepped forward promptly and lowered their spearpoints at him, warningly.

"I'm done with this treaty," he said, "unless you accede to my original request!"

Flannigan was ignorant of this request, and he suddenly became apprehensive of discovery, because it was evidently some personal item not mentioned by his ministers. He was supposed to know what it was, but he did not. So he quickly decided on evasiveness.

"It seems you do nothing but make requests of me," he said.

"Naturally!" exclaimed Xlar'ri. "Why not? You know my armies alone spell defeat or victory for Bidjar Tan. Don't you think I could retire into my own country and hold off this upstart king by myself? Eventually I'd wear him down to where his forces would fade away like a desert river into the sands. So what have I to gain from all this but what I demanded of you in the first place?"

Tauntingly, Flannigan hazarded an

indirect question. "Refresh my memory. I seem to have forgotten."

Xlar'ri's hairless brows arched in mock amusement and surprise. His great arms went akimbo and he laughed. "Who speaks of duplicity now! You know what I want—the only trinket in your harem that's worth guarding it for!"

It was the first time Flannigan knew he had a harem. The common green men were monogamous, as far as he knew. But evidently it was the Emperor's prerogative to have a selection of wives. He hesitated, trying not to reveal his confusion.

"Your fair hostage," Xlar'ri added. "Mnir'sr Nikinra, the karn-ger cat sister of Djikn Kinri. She has no doubt resisted your advances so successfully that you have ceased to regard her as one of your wives. But come now, man! Your memory could never fail you to that extent!"

IF A BOMB had exploded in Flannigan's borrowed skull, he could not have been more incapacitated for the moment. Veins stood out on his forehead and his pulse hammered against his temples, while his recent wound suddenly became the lesser pain in his chest. Cold sweat sprang out on his face and he rose halfway off his couch.

Mnir'ra! Here in Inis'dur, languishing as a slave wife in Gon'ri's harem! He was her captor! His first impulse was to run and find her, to take her in his arms and reveal his true identity—and then challenge the whole planet to take her from him. But in the next instant he knew that this was impossible. In the first place, she would be nauseated by the sight of him. And what was more important, though not to his heart, the fate of Serin Gor depended on keeping his identity a dark secret, to be shared with no one—even to the bitter end.

So Gon'ri had promised her to

Xlar'nr Marna'ri. And why not? He could not hope to enjoy any response from her, monstrosity that he had become. As a bribe to Xlar'ri she would naturally serve a much more useful purpose to him. Flannigan could see the Emperor's point of view clearly.

"I know why you've been putting me off, of course," continued Xlar'ri. "You want victory first. However, this violation of military code which you have just committed gives me the advantage. I am in a position to demand this compensation now—or the treaty is at an end!"

Flannigan did not have to pretend sudden weakness. He *was* weak. He collapsed on his pillow of furs, and Karj'ri scuttled in to attend him.

"Tomorrow," said the latter to Xlar'ri. "Come tomorrow. The Emperor must have rest!"

"Tomorrow I shall return," said Xlar'ri. "And it will be for a final answer!"

Having delivered this ponderous ultimatum, he stomped out of the room with a calculated disdain for the line of armed guards who made a menacing aisle for his powerful figure....

CHAPTER V

Mnir'ra

FLANNIGAN had an idea. But he tried not to admit that his rationalization was partially aimed at an excuse to visit Mnir'ra.

He had to see her. There was no resisting the desire, whatever the consequences.

The harem was in a small palace that stood alone on a tall promontory overlooking the Bay of Inis'dur. It was called a pleasure palace, but it was built more like a medieval castle.

As he rode on a ban'thorn toward its somber-looking gates, ahead of his twenty-man guard detail, he could look out over the bay and see the

countless shadows of his warships lying at anchor. Here and there a few oil lamps flared on the decks, and borne to him on the sea breeze came fragments of singing or shouted conversations. Once in a while he detected the savage chanting of the Djar Li warriors, who were impatient to meet the Serin Ni.

When Djikn Kinri would strike, no one knew. Small scout ships patrolled the Barrier Sea constantly, waiting for the sight of battle sails on the horizon. Advance Intelligence had passed back information that the fleet of the red men consisted of smaller ships, but that they were faster, very numerous, and mounted ominous weapons which Gurund Ritroon had shown them how to construct. Some said the Serin Ni could float thirty thousand men.

Against fifty thousand green men who had larger ships and many of the newer weapons, plus rocket bomb batteries on shore!

Flannigan knew that the odds were still not in favor of his friends across the sea. He had to turn the Djar Li against their racial cousins, the Bidjar Ri. In his meeting with Xlar'nr Marna'ri, he felt he had fused the powder kegs. Now he sought a means of igniting the fuses.

As he stood before the gates while his guards piped the imperial call on their *grin'dnir* gourds, he had a presentiment that the destiny of this whole embattled world again focussed upon him. It lay within his power to write the next chapter of Gra'ghorian history.

At least, he thought, that was some compensation for never being able to hope for Mnir'ra's love....

AFTER HE had been quartered in his royal apartment within the castle, a luxurious meal for two was set out on the eating mats. And

Mnir'ra was summoned to dine alone with the Emperor.

But there was an innovation. Whereas before Gon'ri had appeared to enjoy horrifying his Serin Ni wife by flaunting his ugliness before her, now he wore over his head a dark veil, which concealed his features but did not hinder him from eating or drinking.

A small chime sounded. It meant that in another moment he would see her. He sat there on his cushions, cross-legged, tense, his heart pounding. Since he had seen her last he had been through the Lens and returned.

Returned! The impossible dream come true—yet impossible of complete fulfillment. He wondered if it would have been better never to have succeeded, than to live in the same world with her and never be able to reveal his identity or know her love. To be *hated* by her.

She must not hate him. Yet, how could she feel otherwise toward Gon'ri, the Warrior, chief of her brother's enemies?

SUDDENLY, she was there—Mnir'sr Nikinra, former queen of Serin Gor, daughter of Ank'torna and Jith'loor of old.

One foot and four inches tall, a head shorter than himself, she was still every inch an impressive personage. And she was dressed almost as he had first seen her, long ago, on the shores of Serin Gor by the ancient Temple of Gur. She wore exquisite little woven sandals on her doll-like feet, and from her slim waist to her incredible ankles her pink pastel figure was partially concealed by a diaphanous sort of split skirt. There was nothing else save for the natural adornments of her own beauty—and her sea-blue hair that fell over her perfect shoulders and all

but concealed her firm young breasts.

However, her dark eyes slowed the rising pulse within him. These, alone, had changed. Before, they had been filled with the light of youth and love and laughter. Now they reflected nothing. Neither hate nor despair. Their very lack of expression sent a chill of horror down his spine. They told him that if her body had not yet walked in Zi'lgar-lon, her spirit had.

Or had it? He was determined to find out.

"Come forward and be seated," he commanded, trying to keep his voice from trembling. And he thought there was never such beauty as hers!

Silently, she obeyed. He noticed that she looked for one brief moment at the veil that covered his face. Then she lowered her eyes and waited.

"The wine," he said, presuming correctly that it would be Gonri's custom to have his wives drink before him.

"I wouldn't poison you," she murmured in a low voice.

"And why not?"

She looked up quickly and he saw the spirit in her eyes for the first time, like the karn-ger cat Xlar'nr Marna'ri had referred to. "Why should I rescue you from the exquisite torture of having to live with yourself? I hate you too much to kill you—that's why!"

They sipped wine in silence. Then he asked, "How would you like to go home?"

She did not respond as he had expected her to. In fact, she did not respond at all. She only began to dip her unleavened tube-root bread into her dish of yellow *ban'ath*—a sour liquid cheese made of vegetable milk.

"Well?" he persisted.

Again she looked at him. "Of what value am I to Serin Gor?" she said. "Just something else to defend.

My brother will be here in due time. So your offer is a poor bribe."

"Bribe? For what?"

"For some new masterpiece of treachery. I'll not play your game, whatever it is. Of course you'll whip me for that statement, but I care not. Do with me as you will."

He tensed. "Have I...whipped you?"

Her eyes widened with surprise, and he knew that had been the wrong thing to say.

"Have you *whipped* me! What do you call that!"

She leaned forward over her knees, exposing her perfect back. Flannigan gritted his teeth as he saw the cruel lacework of scars. He strained to keep from jumping up to take her in his arms.

"Are you sick of mind?" she asked. "How could you forget three long years of *torturing*?"

"I wonder if my mind does not fail me at times," he said softly. "I have weighty problems on my mind this night, and I need your help. It concerns the welfare of Serin Gor."

"Whatever you say is a lie, so how do you think you can convince me?"

HE LEANED forward, the lamp-light gleaming on his magnificent physique. "I've long had an idea that we are all senseless to fight. This broad planet lies almost unexplored and undeveloped. There is room in it for all of us. Let us make peace and we'll forget about the ancient Law of Urg, whereby we exacted a tribute of people from you to be sacrificed periodically to our gods. I'll even open up Bidjar Tan to travel for your countrymen, as well as to trade and exploitation. Your brother wants the raw materials we have in our mountains. He is a builder, and he shall have those materials. In exchange for this he can

teach us to build also.

"What do you say? I'll ship you home as a sign of my good will. And in return he can meet me at sea and we'll have a preliminary conference on the subject."

She stared at him incredulously. Then she said, "Do you take me for a child? This is such a total change in your character that no one could possibly believe a word you are saying. Even the trick behind it is obvious. You are afraid of our development, and you seek a free access to our new knowledge, on the basis of peace and friendship, so that the day may come when your superior manpower can outstrip our production. Then you will strike. Gon'ri, I gave you credit, at least, for much greater subtlety."

He straightened up indignantly, trying to convince her. "We do not fear the Serin Ni," he said. "Right now you are far outnumbered. We have three hundred ships, larger than yours, which will carry fifty thousand men and weapons including rocket bombs—thanks to your lost love, Gurund Ritroon."

He saw that his former name caused her to tremble, not with fear, but with grief.

He paused. Then: "Did you really love him so?"

For answer, she caught her face in her hands and cried. "Don't mention his name!" she pleaded.

Quietly, he answered her. "All right. I won't. But just answer one question: What if he should return through the Lens again?"

She brought her head up sharply and glared at him through her tears. "Then I'd defy even you to keep me here! Either I would escape to find him, or he would come here for me."

He ached to tell her the truth, but the lives of thirty thousand red men depended on his silence. And even if

she knew, she would still be able to love only the memory of what he had been. Actually, the truth under these circumstances would be greater torture for her than never finding him again.

"Well, let's get back to the original subject," he said. "How about my proposition?"

"If you mean what you say, don't send me. Send someone whom it would really hurt you, strategically, to release. Send someone who would be valuable to Djikn Kinri in battle."

"Who for instance?"

"Who else but your most important prisoner of war—Djur Djinri."

Djur Djinri! Flannigan trembled with astonishment and elation. He had thought that gallant general had died in battle. But he was here, in the country of his enemy. Flannigan's other best-loved male companion in all this Land of the Lens! Gon'ri had indeed provided himself with hostages.

He slapped his knees in sudden decision. "Good!" he exclaimed. "I'll send Djur Djinri!"

"You couldn't do that," she answered, somewhat bewildered. "You'd be sure to set off a major revolution against you if you did that."

He could not admit that such was precisely his intention—or that it would probably cost him his life. Nor could he tell her of the secret message he planned to give Djur Djinri.

"I am still the Law here," he said. "I'll do what's best for all of us. I tell you—it shall be done!"

"Then, if you are definitely going to send Djur Djinri back to my brother, where am I involved?"

"You are not involved any longer, except that you are free to accompany him if you wish."

She thought a long while. Then she said, "There is nothing to live

for, without—*him*. Unless. Gurund Ritroon returns through the Lens, life has little meaning. It does not matter what happens to me."

"Then, perhaps..." Flannigan was losing control of himself.

"Yes?" Her great, dark eyes looked at him questioningly.

"Perhaps... if I were kind to you, Mnir'ra..." His voice trembled.

Her eyes narrowed instantly. "You could give me a solid gold palace and lick my feet!" she exclaimed. "And I'd still hate the sight or thought of you!"

Flannigan tensed with hurt pride for a moment. Couldn't she see? Couldn't she sense that Gon'ri the Warrior was another man? Then he slumped resignedly.

"You may go," he said tonelessly.

"What, Your Majesty? No whipping tonight? You disappoint me!"

With this icy remark, she got to her feet and walked out, leaving him alone with his thoughts, and the subtle perfume of her that seemed to linger on—and on....

CHAPTER VI

A Message to Djikn Kinri

THE NEXT day, Flannigan moved swiftly. With one of Gon'ri's most loyal officers, he sent a message to Djikn Kinri. The man was young enough and low enough in rank to be untainted by politics and still credulous of victory, for he considered the truce to be some sort of clever subterfuge. He was to board one of the scouting vessels and seek contact with the enemy, under the sign of military truce—which in this world consisted of a metal brazier on the deck that would pour forth clouds of black smoke at the proper moment.

At the same time, he absented himself deliberately from the Court,

leaving no answer for Xlar'nr Marna'ri in regard to Mnir'ra, and he hoped that this affront would be sufficient to light the fuses.

No one knew of the strange experiment he indulged in that day in one of the towers of the palace, and even if the priests had witnessed what he did with a small jar of sulphuric acid and some alcohol, they would have attributed it to magical powers. For these few hours he was no longer Gon'ri the Warrior. He was Michael Flannigan, Doctor of Science.

Then he sought his military prison and commanded the jailers to bring him to General Djur Djinri. The prison was built into the great cliffs behind the city, connecting with a series of large, natural caverns and catacombs, where dungeons and torture chambers abounded.

The warden led him through dark, evil-smelling corridors, followed by Gon'ri's ubiquitous bodyguards, and after ten minutes of slow progress under the light of several acrid-smelling torches, they finally arrived before the thick wooden door of the dungeon they sought.

As the warden unlocked it, Flannigan played a long shot.

"Leave me alone with the prisoner," he said.

The warden looked up at him in surprise, and the captain of his bodyguards stepped forward to protest. "If Your Majesty will permit me," he said, "it is extremely dangerous for you to appear in public at all so soon after an attempt has been made on your life. But you endanger yourself even more by exposing yourself to this prisoner. He has vowed to kill you!"

"I am fully capable of taking care of myself," Flannigan answered, scowling. He stood half a head taller than any of them, and his barrel chest and powerful arms seemed to

be the equivalent of any two of them.

"But your injuries, Sire!" protested the warden. "This man is a seasoned warrior, and very powerful!"

"Out of my way!" Flannigan commanded. "I've got to see him alone because I would extract from him valuable information, and since the methods I will use are secret, belonging to the Priesthood, none of you may witness what I do."

As they stood looking at him in sudden awe and wonderment, he scowled in his best Gon'ri the Warrior manner. "You should be prepared, however. When you see him next, he will be a man without a mind—an idiot! Then I shall return him to our enemy, Djikn Kinri!"

He saw the look of protest on the warden's hawk-like face. "Don't worry. I shall squeeze everything of value from his mind, and when I get through with him he will be of no use to anyone—not even the gods! Now, let me enter!"

This was a fate worse than even the warden could have imagined, so out of sheer respect for his superior in matters of torture, he swung open the door of Djur Djinri's cell and surrendered his torch to the Emperor.

FLANNIGAN immediately perceived a powerful figure in the center of the dungeon. It was a figure somewhat smaller than that of an ordinary green man, as was typical of the Serin Ni, but this was counterbalanced by an enviable mane of blue hair that reached to the red man's shoulders.

He looked into the familiar, ruddy face of Djur Djinri, who had united the Serin Ni guerrillas against the quisling treachery of Zrand'ri in the old days, and led his heroic "Six Hundred" against the superior garrison at Rurz'tlid to defend the coastal batteries of Serin Gor in the

teeth of the first green man invasion. This man was Djikn Kinri's missing left hand, and Flannigan vowed that he would deliver him in time.

While the warden and the guards still peered in after the Emperor, Djur Djinri charged him with a savage yell of hate tempered by fury. Quickly, Flannigan used the end of his great torch like the butt end of a rifle and caught his friend under the chin. The blow knocked him onto his back, and Flannigan pounced on him, his dagger instantly at the other's throat.

In a low voice he said, "Pretend to submit. I have a message for you."

Then he turned to the others behind him and shouted, "Close that door and leave us until I call you!"

Obediently, the green men complied, convinced at last that Gon'ri the Warrior could take care of himself just as well as before he had been wounded. For after all, the prisoner had been weakened by his long incarceration.

Under Flannigan's knee, Djur Djinri grumbled, "Why should I trust you?"

Flannigan did not remove his dagger point from the other's neck. "A secret of State is involved here," he told him. "I want you to bear a message for me to Djikn Kinri. I have already sent word to him requesting a meeting at sea. You will accompany me to that meeting."

Djur Djinri's eyes widened, filled with surprise and speculation over this unexpected possibility. "If you are to meet him," the general asked, "why should I bear your message?"

"Because it is a message that must be delivered after I have left him."

Djur Djinri's eyes narrowed. "This I do not understand," he said.

"You don't have to!" Flannigan retorted, and at the same time he produced out of his pouch a cloth

soaked in ether that he had manufactured that day.

Djur Djinri struggled, but long imprisonment had weakened him as the guards had suspected. And the unfamiliar fumes of the ether in his nostrils soon subdued him—but not entirely.

Flannigan did not want him to be unconscious. "Can you hear me?" he asked.

"Yes," came the answer, slowly, half-consciously. "Wha—what happened?"

"Listen closely if you love Serin Gor. Are you listening? Are you willing to hear me?"

"Yes...." Faintly.

"Then first you must sleep, and when you awake you will be the saviour of your country. Listen to me! Your eyes are heavy with sleep. Every muscle in your body is relaxed. You sleep, you drift into darkness, hearing only my voice...."

THAT NIGHT, under cover of darkness, Djur Djinri was taken to the harbor and secreted on board a first-line ship. It was a truce ship, but the tell-tale smoke brazier was to be brought on deck only after they had passed out of sight of land. Crews on other vessels did not know that the Emperor had gone aboard also. When they applied to the Bidjar Ri fleet admiral for information concerning the mysteriously departing ship, he only grumbled and said, "Emperor's orders." On the other hand the more barbarous admiral of the Djar Li fleet could only respond, "I know nothing about it—and I don't like it." In fact, he sent a message to Xlar'nr Marna'ri, which adequately expressed his gruff sentiments.

Before the fateful vessel passed out of sight of land, Flannigan observed a gathering concentration of lights in

the northern part of the capital city of the green men, and up against the hills. He smiled with grim satisfaction as he realized that those campfires and torches marked the location of Xlar'ri the Strong's main forces.

The fuse, he reflected, had been ignited. The green nations were about to weaken themselves fatally....

CHAPTER VII

The Silhouette of Doom

FLANNIGAN had made it a point to take into his secret confidence precisely those persons whom the most loyal followers of Gon'ri had referred to as the least trustworthy. True to his expectations, they had no sooner seen him off in the harbor than they had hurried back into the city to make the most of the situation.

One of them lost no time in getting word of the meeting between Djikn Kinri and Gon'ri to the leader of the underground, Nr'im Kun'ri. One of them went promptly over to the side of Xlar'nr Marna'ri and reported that Gon'ri had gone insane and was about to betray them all to the enemy. The third told as much to the bewildered royalists among the Bidjar Ri.

But if such opportunists thought that the Emperor was going to be absent long enough for them to make a *coup d'etat*, they were mistaken. As soon as the truce vessel carrying Djur Djinri and Flannigan disappeared over the horizon, it was met by a scout boat, and Flannigan boarded it. This bore him back toward Bidjar Tan, above the city, under cover of the moonless night. His simple, airtight alibi was that he suspected treachery and had laid a trap at home for his enemies. He said he was returning secretly to nip their plans in

the bud. The truce ship, he told his men, was to meet Djikn Kinri's vessel and transfer Djur Djinri into his countrymen's hands. Djikn Kinri was to be informed that the peace talk had been postponed owing to an unforeseen emergency. The captured red general was being returned to the Serin Ni as a token of good faith, in the hope that Djikn Kinri would consider postponing his invasion until another meeting could be arranged.

All of which Flannigan trusted would achieve the purpose for which the entire scheme had been designed.

HOWEVER, before Flannigan reached land, Xlar'ri the Strong made his first move. He stormed the pleasure palace that housed the Imperial Harem, intent upon casting the gauntlet by capturing Gon'ri the Warrior's most prized possession—Mnir'sr Nikinra.

The castle was not defenseless. Gurund Ritroon had given the red-skinned Serin Ni many weapons, among which was the murderous bazooka. This the Bidjar Ri had copied from captured models, and several were put into use to defend the Emperor's seraglio.

On the other hand, the Djar Li savages under Xlar'nr Marna'ri had picked up the use of explosives from their green-skinned cousins and, by dint of numbers, savage aggression and several dozen crude grenades, they destroyed the gates and charged in with spear, cudgel and giant Djar Li bows.

Gon'ri had provided Mnir'ra with guarded private quarters and two Serin Ni slave girls, as he had feared that his green-skinned wives might do her harm. It was to this place, in the largest tower on the edge of the promontory, that Xlar'ri came, leading a score of his painted tribesmen. The Bidjar Ri guards fought half-



Her attempt to die thwarted, Mnir'ra fought to free her arms from Xlar'ri's grasp. But he only laughed, saying: "I'll take time to tame you later . . ."

heartedly to protect the erstwhile queen of their major enemy, and those who had not been run through with a spear or had their skulls crushed soon availed themselves of the opportunity to surrender.

MNIR'RA stood in the center of her spacious apartment, while her maids cowered behind her. Her diminutive, shell-pink figure was proud and straight as Xlar'ri burst in upon her.

He stood there, half covered with the blood of battle, a grisly cudgel in his powerful fist, one mighty arm outstretched to hold back his followers, whose eyes lighted lustfully as they observed these more refined and exquisitely formed Serin Ni women. After his deep-set, dark eyes had taken in Mnir'ra's form, they paused when they encountered her cold, unyielding stare.

"I have only heard of your beauty," he said at last. "Now that I see you for the first time, I can understand why the Emperor was reluctant to surrender you to me."

"I see nothing of surrender," replied Mnir'ra. "It appears you intend to take me by force."

"True," said Xlar'ri. "This is war. Gon'ri has gone out to gibber of peace with your brother, thus proving his insanity. I am taking over."

Mnir'ra thought: So it was no trick! He was sincere about his plan for peace! Why? What mysterious force is changing the complexion of Gon'ri's character from night into day?

"And I suppose that I am to accompany you now?" she asked.

"Is there any other choice?" laughed Xlar'ri. "Come! There is no time for talk! My main forces are already upon the city. You are not safe here."

"Wait!" she exclaimed, detaining

him with an uplifted hand. "Can you guarantee the safety of my maids?"

Xlar'ri turned to look back at his grinning warriors. Then he shrugged. "Why should I?"

"Then there is one other choice," she answered.

In the same instant she signalled to her maids and they made a dash for the window. Mnir'ra ran interference for them, wielding a dagger against those who sprang forward to prevent the suicide. The first maid screamed and disappeared into the roaring abyss below, but the second one was caught, half-disrobed, and flung over a powerful green-shoulder. Xlar'ri, himself, disarmed Mnir'ra and pinned her hands behind her.

He looked down into her hate-filled eyes and laughed silently with his. It was an eloquent message that she read only too clearly.

"I'll take time later to tame you," he said in a low voice that only she could hear. "You're beautiful! Perhaps the time has come on this world for green and red to mix. Maybe that's the real answer to peace. Think it over, Mnir'sr Nikinra!"

"Xlar'ri!" exclaimed one of the Djar Li warriors, who had been leaning out of the window. "Look!" He pointed out to sea.

THEY ALL looked and saw that Lan Ba'na, the golden moon, was rising over Ces'son Nar. But on its bright path lay a telltale silhouette—the shape of a mighty battle fleet of ships.

"What is that?" he said. "It can't be the pink-livered Serin Ni!"

"But it is!" exclaimed Mnir'ra triumphantly. "Djikh Kinri has chosen the hour well. While all Bidjar Tan lies stricken with the poisons of anarchy, he is taking advantage of the confusion. And he will win!" She stepped toward the window and

Xlar'ri followed her, still holding her hands behind her. Her eyes were alight with eagerness and the hunger for revenge. "Look at them! They cover the sea! There are thirty thousand warriors out there!"

"But what of Gon'ri and his truce?" queried Xlar'ri, watching her closely.

"Naturally, my brother did not trust him. May Zich'yeh devour his entrails and die of poisoning! Gon'ri's day is at an end! The tyranny of twice ten thousand moons is done—thanks to the foresight and wisdom of Gurund Ritroon! Long live Serin Gor!"

Xlar'ri jerked her roughly off, her feet and tucked her under one arm. "Your brains are weak with dreaming," he said. "The Serin Ni may take Bidjar Tan, or they may not. But they will never take Djar Li Tan. Ha! Just let them try! Come on, men! Back to the desert! We'll let the red skins waste their strength on our cousins. This saves us the trouble. Later on, at our convenience, we shall return!"

So it was that while the semi-disorganized garrison of Inis'dur girded itself for the major battle of history, a defiant shout of triumph passed from one Djar Li contingent to another, and the Djar Li fleet in the harbor began to hoist anchors and flee. These latter were no longer a part of the Empire. Gon'ri the Warrior's might was crumbling fatally and Djar Li Tan was being restored to the status of a sovereign nation by the simple expedient of leaving the Bidjar Ri to face the enemy alone—the Bidjar Ri, whose numbers had been divided by insurrection and reduced by the brief but bloody battle against Xlar'ri's desert tribesmen. The scroll of Fate was never as legible as it was this night.

While Xlar'ri the Strong carried his secret prize on the lunging back of a ban'thron deep into the formidable, half-explored wilderness of Djar Li Tan...

CHAPTER VIII

Djar Djinri's Message

WHEN DJIN KINRI received Flannigan's message concerning the peace conference, his battle fleet was already on the high sea. Sunny Serin Gor and the gleaming, white city of Rurz'tlid, with its towering Temple of Gur, lay far behind, fading like a distant, scintillating jewel on the flowered plain of Raj'dur and under the distance-purpled shoulders of Mag'dur—those historic hills that seemed to lift their heads above the horizon to observe his course and say: *When you return, we shall be free! Bring freedom to Serin Gor!*

Djinn Kinri stood alone on the bridge of the flagship, looking back at his country and at his following fleet. He had vowed that this day should come to pass. Plenty of ships, plenty of men, and plenty of superior weapons. Gurund Ritroon had made it all possible.

He wished that the Avenger were standing at his side now, superhumanly powerful and miraculously endowed with a godly wisdom. The only way he could explain Gurund Ritroon's death, even under the impact of the rocket bomb, was that his mission within the Lens was at an end. Whether or not he would ever return was a matter which only Fate could decide.

And this brought him to thoughts of Mnir'ra, his beloved sister, whom he was determined to rescue. Would her return to Serin Gor be only an excuse for her to commend her soul

to Gur and walk in Zi'ilgar-lon, the Desert of Death? He prayed to Gur that Gurund Ritroon would return.

And he prayed for the strength to destroy his mortal enemy, Gon'ri the Warrior....

"Sire!" said his chief aide, suddenly appearing at his side, "we have picked up a Bidjar Ri scout boat. The green man brings you a message from Gon'sr Lit'ri!"

"A message?" Djik'ri, who was half a head taller than any of his men, turned to look at his aide. "What kind of message? Why should that offal of a Zat send me a message?"

"He wishes to meet you at sea and talk of peace. As proof of his good will, he is bringing Djur Djinri with him."

Djik'ri tensed. He grasped the aide's arm. "Great would be my good fortune if I could have Djur Djinri by my side! I don't know what trick Gon'ri may have in mind to be using Djur Djinri for the bait, but the main point is that he is bringing him!"

"What do you make of his wishes concerning a peace conference?" queried the aide.

Djik'ri's black eyes narrowed, while the great mane of his blue hair fluttered in the wind of the open sea. "It is either camouflage or fear. If the former, I reject his talk of peace. If the latter, let us make the most of it! We sail on!"

"But—our orders, Sire, when we sight his truce ship?"

"Capture it or sink it! Take him prisoner or destroy him! If the tables have turned at last, why should I be less callous than he? As far as I am concerned, this is a war to the finish!"

"But the Bidjar Ri do not become prisoners," protested the aide. "They

die fighting. If we were forced to destroy the vessel, what of Djur Djinri?"

"Then fight deceit and cunning with the same fire. When they show the smoke of truce, show them the same. But when they are at our gun-whales, capture them or destroy them. Only bring me Djur Djinri—and Gon'ri the Warrior. No! I'll take Gon'ri, myself!"

THAT NIGHT, as Lan-Ba'na began to light the sky astern, they sighted the truce ship from Bidjar Tan. It came underneath a slender plume of smoke, and Djikn Kinri's flagship raised a similar plume.

Djik'ri the Hunter had prepared himself for battle. On his broad, muscular back he wore a quiver of metal-tipped arrows for his cross-bow. Enveloping his stomach and chest was a steel cuirass, forged in the furnaces which Gurund Ritroon had built. On his left arm was a steel buckler and on his head was a helmet of the same material. In his right hand was a spear, and at his hip was his fighting dagger. He watched the approaching ship grimly, waiting for a chance to board her, while four bazookas swung ominously into position behind him. It was good to feel prepared, at last, for this age-old tyrant enemy.

Before he had the satisfaction of having the other vessel within his reach, however, it luffed into the wind to his starboard and came nearly to a standstill. In another minute, he espied a small boat approaching him across the intervening distance, and he ordered his captain to luff also.

When the boat drew in alongside he saw that it was manned by four green men. And in its bow sat Djur Djinri.

"Take the green men," he ordered, "and sink the Bidjar Ri vessel. All I want is Djur Djinri."

A brief struggle ensued, during which the green men in the small boat died fighting against overwhelming odds. The flagship's bazookas struck home on the Bidjar Ri vessel, and it began to sink astern. This was all Djikn Kinri cared to see. After generations of suffering beneath the heel of this enemy, the Serin Ni were out for vengeance and unconditional conquest. There was but one rule to this war—death to the enemy!

He went below to greet his old friend and battle companion, General Djur Djinri.

The general, however, had something wrong with him. As one of the sputtering ship's lanterns was raised to his face, his vacant expression became obvious to all. Either he had been tortured out of his senses, thought Djikn Kinri, or the heathen priests of Bidjar Tan had bewitched him.

"We obtained information from one of the green men, Sire," said one of Djik'ri's officers. "Gon'ri was not on board the truce vessel."

"All the better," replied Djik'ri. "That means I'll still have a chance at him in Inis'dur. Sails ahead! We're not far off shore now. Remember your battle orders. Into the teeth of the enemy, until we die—or they! And may Gur grant us victory this night!"

Whereupon he took his old friend below deck to examine him more thoroughly.

NO MATTER what Djik'ri said or did to Djur Djinri, however, it was to no avail. The latter was devoid of speech, although it was observed his tongue had not been cut out. He did not recognize his king.

Neither did he wish to partake of food or drink. He only sat there and stared into nothingness.

Djik'ri struck his own head in his anger and frustration. "So this is Gon'ri's trick, is it? I'll change his perverted humor into a cry for mercy—which he'll not get! To send me my closest friend and most valued officer in a state like this is the depth of depravity! If he has sought by this means to tweak my nose, he's done it! But it will cost him his head!"

So it was that Djik'ri's fleet came upon Inis'dur. They were still well out to sea when the shore batteries opened up with a barrage of rocket bombs. Rocket bombs answered back from the ships of the red men, but the latter were somewhat taken by surprise. Djikn Kinri did not believe the green men had been able to perfect the weapon. Some of his ships were hit and knocked out before the Serin Ni could strike an effective blow. And still between them and the shore lay a formidable fleet of warships which now maneuvered to engage them.

One bomb landed perilously close to the flagship, throwing all hands into the scuppers. But the effect of the explosion was particularly unexpected in regard to Djur Djinri. As if he had been specifically conditioned to respond to the sound of battle, he snapped out of his trance and came bounding up on deck to find Djik'ri.

He found him on the bridge and grasped his arm.

"Djur'ri!" exclaimed Djik'ri exultantly. "You are well! What happened to you?"

"There is no time to explain," said Djur Djinri. "I bring you a message!"

"What? Another message? From

whom—from Gon'ri?"

"No—from *Gurund Ritroon*!"

DJIK'RI turned abruptly and grasped Djur Djinni fiercely by both arms. "From *Gurund Ritroon*!" he shouted incredulously. "Where is he? Has he returned through the Lens? Have you seen him?"

"No! No! No! Listen to me! I know not how I came by it, but he has given me important knowledge. It—it just came into my head."

"Then he has spoken to you from beyond the Lens! Praise be to Gur! He has not forsaken us in this hour! Speak, man! What is the message?"

Djur Djinni shook his head to clear it of his strange obsession, but again Flannigan's carefully planted post-hypnotic suggestion took effect. "He says—he is working for your success. He is with you. He says—"

The screech and roar of the bombs halted him for a moment. Then he went on: "He says—don't attack Inis'dür head on. If you do, you'll fall right into a death trap."

"But what else can I do?" asked Djinn Kinri.

"Do the unexpected. Veer to the north and get out of range of their shore batteries. Then strike in overland and capture the city under your own barrage from your fleet, before the troops on the Bidjar Ri ships can all get ashore. Capture their shore installations and you'll have their fleet as well as the city!"

Djinn Kinri stared at his friend as though he were an oracle of the gods. Then he slapped the other's shoulder in his enthusiasm.

"Again the wisdom of *Gurund Ritroon* is with us!" he exclaimed. "It shall be done!"

Whereupon he shouted commands at his officers and the flagship began to change its course. His fleet,

though mystified, followed his example—luckily for the future of Serin Gor.

CHAPTER IX

The Invasion

IN A SECRET compartment in the Emperor's private chambers was a chest containing a strange collection of equipment. There were a steel cuirass, a steel buckler and a steel helmet. Also, there were a crossbow and a double quiver of copper-tipped arrows—all the technological gift of *Gurund Ritroon* alias Flannigan during his first visit to the planet Gra'ghr, within the Lens. These had been collected as trophies of war by Gon'ri the Warrior himself, and he had kept them for his own personal use.

But Flannigan had made some new additions of his own. There were a red cloak and a mask that would fully cover his face. There were also a half dozen small grenades. But most important of all, there was a brand new weapon which in his own world had often changed the course of history. He had forged and tempered it secretly. It lay there now, waiting to affect the history of Gra'ghr, crude and heavy, but sharp and tempered—a shining sword.

As Flannigan returned toward Bidjar Tan in the scout ship, he was thinking of the contents of that chest and the use to which he would put them. He was also thinking of Mnir'ra's safety. He was even looking at the dark towers of the pleasure palace on the promontory when he heard the explosions of bazooka shells and grenades and saw the flash and fire of sudden conflict there.

Immediately, he knew what had happened. Xlar'nr Marna'ri had

struck even sooner than he had expected! Naturally, he would be after Mnir'ra.

Flannigan quickly urged his small crew of three green men to greater efforts, measuring time and distance, trying to formulate a new plan of action. He knew he would get to the castle too late to prevent Mnir'ra's abduction and that to rescue her now would probably involve a chase into the deserts of Djar Li Tan.

But it had been his intention to be on hand at Inis'dur to help the Serin Ni from behind the lines when they attacked. If they would hold off the invasion for only a few days, he thought, he might have a chance to go after Mnir'ra. Perhaps that was the best plan. He would go immediately to the palace and pick up his battle gear. While the country remained under the impression that he was out at sea having a peace conference with Djikn Kinri he would be traveling incognito, following Xlar'ri's trail.

Incognito.... He was incognito already. It would be a masquerade within a masquerade. He must have another name. He thought of Flannigan. In Grah'orian speech, the name would be Flanin'gan Kinri. Flan'ri for short. He had long thought of this new identity, for one good reason. It might prove convenient to his plans to have Gon'ri the Warrior actually appear to be dead. Then, in his new disguise, he could operate under cover without fear of having the one identity confused with the other.

This train of thought was interrupted by the arrival of his boat close to land. The green men leapt into the shallow water and pulled the scout boat through the surf, closer in to the lonely stretch of beach above the city and the promontory. At the same time, in that portion of the city

which lay northward, against the hills and a short distance inland from his position, he observed that a great battle was progressing, undoubtedly between the Bidjar Ri and the Djar Li tribesmen:

At least he had achieved his purpose there, he thought.

"You will return to sea," he told the green men. "I must reach the main palace in time to help defend it."

"Xlar'ri has broken the treaty!" exclaimed one of them. "This internal war will weaken us still more—and Djikn Kinri may strike at any moment!"

Another of them put his hand on the hilt of his dagger and scowled at the Emperor. "Perhaps Nr'im Kun'ri is right," he said. "You are leading us to destruction!"

For answer, Flannigan swiftly planted a blow in the other's solar plexus. As the man grunted and doubled over, Flannigan brought his knee up sharply into the other's face, breaking his nose, while at the same time he gave him a deadly rabbit punch on the back of the neck. In an instant, the warrior slumped senseless to the ground. Flannigan thought that in the role of an ordinary Irishman he would have sought to settle the issue with a clean uppercut, but as Gon'ri he had to play the part, and much depended on his holding his identity as Emperor of Bidjar Tan this night.

He drew his dagger and faced the other two. "I'll have no insubordination here," he said coldly. "I am still your Emperor, and I know what I'm doing. Why do you suppose I sought to hold back Djikn Kinri's invasion with the false promise of peace? I knew that this fearful treachery would strike us from within. This affair must be settled first before we can meet the

Serin Ni."

"Then you did not really intend to make peace with the redskins?" asked one of the two remaining green men.

"Of course not! It was all a trick to gain time, and we can only pray to Zich'yeh that it will work. I foresaw this move of Xlar'ri's, which he might not have made had I been present—and yet I am here! Get back to your boat and watch for the ships of the Serin Ni!"

IN THAT moment, Flannigan and the other two saw a ship round the promontory, emerging from the harbor of Inis'dur. It was heading swiftly north, toward Djar Li Tan.

"That's a Djar Li ship!" exclaimed one of the boatmen. "And look! There's a second one, and a third!"

Within a matter of minutes, a score of ships was to be seen tacking northward. It was obvious that the Djar Li fleet was deserting. Flannigan said nothing, because he was too busy observing the moonlit horizon.

Djkn Kinri's fleet was in sight! Flannigan's heart pounded in his elation. This was the time and the hour—*now*, at the height of the enemy's confusion! And if Djur Djinri had been picked up, the red men would have a real chance for victory.

"Report to your captains in the harbor," he told the two boatmen. "The hour has struck. We must take our battle stations."

Both men looked at him in puzzlement. "But the Djar Li fleet is not attacking us. It flees!"

"Yes, but look you to the horizon and tell me what you see!"

Both men looked, then sucked in their breaths. "The Serin Ni!" they exclaimed, simultaneously.

"My plan to delay this invasion for a few more days has failed, so get to your posts," insisted Flannigan.

"This is the night in which ten thousand moons of future history will be decided!"

Silently, the green men obeyed, taking their unconscious companion with them. They knew that in the absence of Nr'im Kún'ri's guerrillas and in the face of the Djar Li desertion, the odds might be against them. But the enemy was at hand. There was nothing to do but fight.

Flannigan admired their unswerving courage, and he wished that one day the green men and the red men would unite to dedicate their combined resources to the greater cause of mutual improvement.

Tonight, however, a great war was at hand. It was too late to think of Mnir'ra just now. He could have followed the dictates of his heart and pursued his original plan to effect her rescue from Xlar'nr Marna'ri, but the dictates of reason and altruism kept him here. The Serin Ni needed him—Mnir'ra's people. He could not let them down....

THE CASTLE, as he had hoped, was deserted. Wreckage and dead bodies lay everywhere, giving mute testimony to the savage struggle for the Emperor's harém. The first thing he did was explore the place to make sure that Mnir'ra had not been brutally mistreated and left here to die, like several of the green women he had found. When he could at last safely conclude that Xlar'ri had actually taken her away with him, he turned to the business of war.

While the great battle fleet of the Serin Ni drew closer under the rocket batteries of Inis'dur, Flannigan busied himself setting up his bazookas to cover those shore installations. Some of them were within range, out on the promontory, itself, and he still had ammunition. He planned to open fire shortly after they did.

Just as he found himself ready, the shore batteries sprang to life. He could count six batteries of twelve shoots each. They stood out momentarily like swords of fire, then blinked out. And out at sea, beyond the green man fleet, he saw the bright flashes and heard the muffled explosions that marked several good hits.

The war of the ages had begun.

Then he saw answering sword flames flash out from the Serin Ni fleet, from scores of ships, and soon the shores of the Inis'dur were reverberating with answering explosions. Djikn Kinri's ships kept sailing into the teeth of the battle.

Still he refrained from firing his bazookas at the nearest batteries of the green men. The time would be ripe only if Djur Djinri came through.

He gritted his teeth and cursed himself for having depended on suggestion as the means of getting his vital message to Djikn Kinri. If the latter's plan of battle were not altered abruptly, it could end in defeat for the Serin Ni. He should have sacrificed himself and gone personally.

Just then, he saw the flagship start to tack north. He was sure of what he was seeing when he saw following ships suddenly change course in its wake.

"Long live Serin Gor!" he shouted, in the middle of a broad grin. It was a very Irish grin, right in the middle of Gon'ri the Warrior's face.

Then he fired his bazookas....

LONG BEFORE a third of the Bidjar Ri fleet could maneuver out of the harbor to engage the tail end of the Serin Ni fleet, steel-helmeted red men were swarming inland behind the promontory, and over it, to take the shore batteries and the city. Logically, they also sought to take the castle there, as it commanded an excellent position.

It was at that point that the garrison forces from the bay area of the city made contact with them, and all along the ridge of the promontory and even at the entrance to the castle itself, a bitter battle raged.

But red man bazookas, crossbows and grenades, plus all the recent green man disillusionment, internal reverses and confusion, gradually tipped the scales in favor of the Serin Ni, and shore battery after shore battery was taken. Simultaneously, the Bidjar Ri fleet began to receive a double fire, both from a task force of the red fleet at sea and from the shore as well. While other contingents took the northern flank of the city where no garrison was left to defend it!

Where were Djur Djinri and Djikn Kinri?—thought Flannigan, as he maintained his fire against troops coming up from the harbor. How he would relish being at their side this minute, fighting shoulder to shoulder with them—for Serin Gor!

But how could he? Bitterly, he remembered that he wore the body of Gon'sr Lit'ri, Emperor of the Bidjar Ri—their mortal enemy!

He knew he could not allow himself to be captured. Now was the best time to let everyone consider Gon'ri the Warrior as dead—lost in battle. Now was the best time to acquire his new identity, Flan'ri. He had to get to the palace and pick up his weapons. Inasmuch as the Serin Ni evidently needed no further assistance, for the time being, his interests could take him northward, on the trail of Xlar'ri the Strong—and Mnir'ra....

CHAPTER X

The Caves of Dread

BUT HOW escape from the castle? Its entrance was blocked by the Serin Ni. Obviously, he would have to

get out on the seaward side.

He left his bazookas and ran into the interior, along passageways dimly illuminated by sputtering fat lamps. He could hear the approaching voices of exploring squads of soldiers, and his pulse raced with nostalgic emotion as he recognized the familiar accents of the Serin Ni.

Strange, he thought, what allegiance he felt for this life-loving, beautiful race of little red men—yet they would probably try to kill him on sight. Even if he were fully armed, he knew he could not harm one of their number, even in self-defense. Thus, by reason of his very affection for them, he was doubly endangered.

His friends—the benefactors of his own science and guidance—were a deadly nemesis now! And it would be futile to reveal himself and proclaim the truth of his identity—that he was that same Gurund Ritroon whom they worshipped. They would only laugh at the incongruity of Gon'ri the Warrior's insane ravings, and he would get a metal-tipped arrow through his neck for all his trouble.

He was not thinking so much of his own hide. He was thinking of Mnir'ra. In spite of her hatred of him—she needed him now....

SUDDENLY, Flannigan was aware of being followed. He heard, close behind him, the slight clank of a shield against stone, and out of the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of a steel-helmeted warrior running head-on after him, spear in hand, intent upon making a kill. The red men, he knew, did not try to take green men prisoners as a rule, because experience had taught them that they preferred to die fighting, whether armed or not.

So Flannigan ran also. He knew the castle a little better than his pursuer, so he soon led him in a direction which put more distance between

the two of them and the other red men, and which brought him ever closer to the seaward side.

At the end of a long passageway, he came upon a heavy door beneath an oil lamp that revealed him plainly to the man behind him. He tried the door latch and found that it was not locked. He was quite sure now that he had arrived at the great tower overlooking the sea.

Just as he leaped high in the air and knocked the oil lamp out of its niche above him, his ribs were lightly grazed by a spear that buried itself in the wood of the door, and at the same time he shrieked in pain. As darkness enveloped him he opened the door and swung it wide. Simultaneously, he jumped behind it and waited. His shriek of pain had been a ruse to inspire over-confidence in his pursuer.

He found himself in a large, circular room, in the opposite wall of which was a wide, open window, and the sea's horizon, gold-limned with the light of Lan Ba'na. That would have to be his avenue of escape, he reasoned, if he could temporarily disable the red man.

Suddenly he was aware of cautious footsteps on the other side of the door, and he heard the tell-tale creak of a cross-bow spring, a spring which he, had designed. Assuming that the other be no fool, he crouched down, very low.

As the other leapt suddenly into the room and fired his crossbow at where Flannigan's chest might have been, the latter lunged beneath the shot and tackled the red man. His superior size and weight gave him the momentum he needed, and the other clattered to the floor into a broad patch of moonlight.

But in the same moment Flannigan found himself wrestling with a veritable karn-ger cat. He found himself also trying to hold off a powerful

hand that had a dagger in it, while his own right hand found the red man's throat.

It was then that he saw his adversary clearly in the moonlight—a strong, finely chiseled face, a great wild mane of sea-blue hair, and a pair of fierce black eyes.

"Djik'ri!" he yelled.

"Yes, Gon'ri!" answered Djik'ri contemptuously. "Better not weaken now, you son of a Zat!"

But how could he keep from weakening? Here was his beloved friend, whom he should be hugging rather than choking.

"Djik'ri! You don't understand! I—" He could have killed Djik'ri. He felt the requisite strength in his muscular hand. "Oh, God!"

In the fraction of a second in which his emotions weakened him, Djik'ri kicked up his legs and threw a head scissors on him, and he went over on his back. In the next second, he felt the keen point of a dagger at his throat and saw Djik'ri's two eyes blazing hatred down into his single one.

"Before you kill me," he said rapidly, "remember Mnir'ra! I—"

Djik'ri's white teeth flashed a snarl and his chin quivered with murderous rage. "Running true to form, aren't you!" he shouted. "Don't think I'm going to let you save your stinking hide that way! You can't threaten me with Mnir'ra! What more could you do to her? Where is she? Tell me—and I'll make it painless, Gon'ri! Otherwise I'll toss your entrails to Zich'yeh and send your heart as a present to the Djar Li!"

"But I'm trying to tell you! Xlar'nr Marn'ri took her!"

"Xlar'nr— You mean the chief of the Djar Li tribes?"

"Yes! Tonight! Just before the battle started. If you let me go after her—"

"Do you think I'm an idiot! I'll go after her myself, with ten thousand men!"

"But Djik'ri—that would be fatal! You would weaken your forces here, and the hills are swarming with the members of the revolution. They would return and wipe out your remaining troops here, and your own force would be massacred by the Djar Li! Don't be a fool!"

"You will not dictate to me!" replied Djik'ri. "You've dictated your last, Gon'ri! I'll do the thinking from now on!"

Desperately, Flannigan rolled away from the dagger point in an effort to renew the struggle, but Djik'ri's grip held. Instead of stabbing him, however, the red-man king reversed the dagger and used its heavy hilt like a black jack.

Flannigan was not quite sure what hit him. He only knew that blackness engulfed him like a tidal wave....

WHEN HE regained consciousness, he was completely surrounded by darkness. He lay on his back on a cold stone floor. His head felt as though it had been split by an axe. His mouth was as dry as parchment. And he was hungry.

Then he thought of his encounter with Djik'ri Kinri—and of Mnir'ra's abduction. He thought of Djik'ri's threat to go after her with ten thousand men.

He sat up abruptly. "No! You can't do that!" he exclaimed aloud. His voice echoed back from walls both near and distant, and it seemed to him that he was in a subterranean cavern.

Then he muttered, only half aloud, "Where am I?"

"Sire! We are in the Caves of Dread!"

The unexpected voice, vaguely familiar to him, came from somewhere

close by. He sprang to his feet and reached for his dagger only to find that he was unarmed.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"It is I, Gon'ri. Karj'nur Kun'ri."

Into Flannigan's mind came the memory of an ancient green man who had made secret signs to him and spoken of "Secret Gods." It was Karj'ri, the High Priest of Zich'yeh, chief advisor to the Emperor.

"Karj'ri! What are you doing here? Where are you?"

"Beside you, Sire. The Serin Ni did not take many prisoners, but you and I they have preserved for yet a little while. It seems we are beneficiaries of a very special dispensation on Djikn Kinri's part."

Catching the note of bitter sarcasm in the old priest's voice, Flannigan asked him, "Are we to be kept prisoners like this indefinitely? Or left here to die of thirst and starvation?"

A dry chuckle was Karj'ri's first answer. Then he said, "It appears we are worthy of much more."

"Meaning what?"

"Don't you get the idea?" queried Karj'ri, puzzled by his Emperor's short memory. "I said we are in the Caves of Dread." This was supposed to be self-explanatory.

Into Flannigan's mind came the memory of the wailing lament of the bards of Serin Ni, during the Season of Urg, when the sacrificial victims were being selected to be shipped to Bidjar Tan:

*Fair Nil'ra hears us crying,
She hears the mir'h trees sighing
 'neath Purple Moon.*

*O ancient Queen of Beauty,
Thy love-path in the woodland
 was left too soon!*

*No more your sandaled footsteps
Tread light the hills of Rur'tlid,
 where R'ur birds cried.*

*You sleep where Yun'dlir slept
In caves of dread, where Jin'r hid
 and our hearts died!*

Flannigan thought hard: *In caves of dread, where Jin'r hid...*

Suddenly he asked, "Who was Jin'r?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the priest. "Then your memory is not so short! Thousands of moons ago he was brought to Bidjar Tan among the other Serin Ni victims for the sacrifices. We sent him to these caves, along with the rest, to wait his turn to be brought to the Temple, but he could not be found later. He was never found. Some say he hid somewhere and eluded us until he starved to death, but the priesthood knows that he escaped, probably to die beneath the claws of a karn-ger cat in the wilderness."

"Escaped! How?"

But Karj'ri did not answer. And Flannigan thought: so this is where all those poor devils were brought, under the Law of Urg, to wait their turn to be brought to the block of sacrifice! No wonder they call this place the Caves of Dread!

As Gurund Ritroon, he had helped Djikn Kinri to defy the Law of Urg, and the planet had been in the grip of war ever since. Thank God, he thought, that an end was being made to the whole affair and that he had again been instrumental in bringing victory to the Serin Ni.

Or had he? Was victory really theirs? With Djik'ri's occupation forces busy keeping the remaining Bidjar Ri in hand, the vast reserves represented by the Djar Li tribes and the thousands of green man guerrillas under Nr'im Kun'ri still served to maintain the final outcome as an unknown quantity in the equation. Now, if Djik'ri were actually going to divide his forces to chase after Mnr'ra in

Xlar'n Marna'ri's own territory, tragedy could be the only result! Flannigan did not know how, but he knew he had to prevent that tragedy from occurring.

He found Karj'ri's withered arm and gripped it. "How did Jin'r escape?" he demanded to know.

KARJ'RI TOOK his time in answering. He spoke as if every word had been weighed carefully in his mind.

"I will tell you first of all that the secret of escape from these caves is known to me. Secondly, I could have been gone from here long since, but I waited for your return to consciousness because your people still need you, Gon'sr Lit'ri, to guide them out of chaos and defeat. Yet, only the priesthood can help you to help your people, and we, the priests, want you behind us. In short, I will show you the way out if you will give me a certain promise." As he felt Flannigan's threatening grip on his arm, he added, "There is no need to contemplate forcing me to tell you how to escape. I am old, with twice ten thousand years of life. I have little fear of death, Sire."

"Then speak! What promise will you have from me?"

"That you will come with me to the camp of Nr'im Kun'ri and accompany us to the hidden places of the Secret Gods. The time is upon us, and if we approach those ancient powers we would do it as officially as possible. I am the High Priest, and you are the Emperor. We cannot fail!"

Flannigan snorted in disgust. "At a time like this you bother me with old wives' tales? You suggest that I should give allegiance to my would-be assassin, Nr'im Kun'ri? There is a much more practical consideration before us. I would escape to reunite the physical forces of *men*, not gods! Let the priest-

hood attend to its gods. The State must look to its soldiers! Now, let's get out of here!"

"I seem to recall," said Karj'ri, "that you did not believe in the legend of Gur, which maintained that if we invaded Serin Gor we would be visited by Gurund Ritroon, Son of Gur, the Avenger. It was an ancient legend, an 'old wives' tale', as you put it. But the fact remains that Gurund Ritroon did appear, and his was the strength and knowledge of a god. You owe your defeat this very day to the coming of Gurund Ritroon. A miracle, perhaps, but it came to pass, just as miracles came to pass in the ancient days of Gur himself, when he saved both the Serin Ni and ourselves by placing us within the Lens so that we would not be burned in the flames of celestial cataclysm in that other world which was the red people's home, and which we adopted when we came there from out of the void, uncounted ages past. I tell you, this is again in the age of miracles, and—"

"Wait a minute!" Flannigan's hair almost stood on end. He was remembering the ancient legend. When the power of the Lens first manifested itself in him, the whole story had come to him in a dream, or a trance, like a racial memory emerging out of the mist of time. He recalled that the original home of the little red people had been Earth itself. Also, the green men had appeared on the scene and warred against them. Then a celestial cataclysm had threatened, and the sun grew hot. The mysterious entity known as Gur had come to Earth and saved them all, causing them to enter the Lens where they were safe. The Lens, he reasoned, might be explained as some gateway into another plane or dimension. Then the Earth had been turned to lava and a piece of it had whirled off on a tangent to become a satellite, which explained the location

of the Lens on the Moon.

But now Karj'ri had suddenly thrown into the whole picture a revelation that shook him to the core. He had said, *'We came there from out of the void...'*

This meant—

"Karj'ri! Do you mean to say that at one time the green race possessed the science and the means of traversing the great void between worlds?"

"Have you forgotten, then, the more ancient legend of our Secret Gods?" asked Karj'ri. "Well, you have lived long, and I told it to you when you were a child. Moreover, your whole mind and temperament have always made you blind to the subtlety of the ancient mysteries. You have always been a bloody-handed warrior.

"However," Karj'ri continued, "I sense that something in you has changed. You are somehow more sensitive, your faculties more refined. Perhaps now the secret legend can be retold without the danger of your forgetting it so soon.

"**A**GES AND ages ago, we were a people much the same as we are now, but we lived on another world of our own, across the dark distances of the void, in that outer region beyond the Lens. But there came to us, from the void, a visitation of the god people. They had great ships and their powers were beyond our comprehension. Although we were made into a race of slaves to them and were forced to worship them as gods, we benefited greatly by their presence, enjoying many miraculous conveniences, complete security against our enemies, and emancipation from all other work except attending these god beings who lived with us.

"But then it seems that other god people, of another type, came from the void, and there was a great war

in which such terrible powers were unleashed that our whole world was made an unfit place in which to live. Two of the remaining gods assembled some of our number in two ships and took us on a long voyage in search of another home, which eventually turned out to be Panh, the ancient home of the Serin Ni."

Panh, the ancient name of Earth! Flannigan trembled at the enormity of the story being unfolded.

"During that voyage," continued Karj'ri, "the green men plotted against the gods, because they feared them and their powers. They even found a way of using the power of the god people to imprison them forever. And this was done shortly after the arrival of Panh. The two god men were tricked, and they and their deadly ships were locked forever in the temples, where they have remained to this day.

"All green men agreed that these Secret Gods would be released only if anything ever threatened our existence. To be slaves again to those gods would be the lesser of two evils. At least we would again be safe from our enemies."

"Do you mean to say," said Flannigan, "that the prisons in which these... 'god-beings'... were placed are here on this planet?"

"Yes!" said Karj'ri. "All that was ours came through the Lens. The temples of the Secret Gods are here. One of them lies up in the wild mountain regions of Bidjar Tan. The other is in the still more remote Hills of the Sky."

"And where is that?"

Karj'ri hesitated. "I would be telling you too much," he said. "Come! We must get out of these caves. But first, give me your promise—that you will side with the priesthood."

Flannigan thought fast. He was not worried about any promises. Where

such a father of treachery as Karj'ri was concerned, he would not have any qualms about deceiving him. But he was wondering how much he should believe concerning this business of the Secret Gods. In the face of the practical emergency affecting Mnir'ra and the fate of all the Serin Ni, he would be a starry-eyed lunatic to go running off into the hills with a bunch of revolutionists and fanatical priests in search of a spiderweb of legends! No! Give him a handful of grenades and his sword!

"All right!" he lied. "You have the promise of Gon'sr Lit'ri." Which was no promise at all, he rationalized, because the Emperor had ceased to exist. Outside these caves, he would give Karj'ri the priest, who had sacrificed thousands of the Serin Ni to heathen gods, only what he deserved.

CHAPTER XI

RED MASK

DJKIN KINRI tried once more to escape from his bonds. He strained every muscle until blood mingled with the tight cords binding his hands to the tall stake. On top of the stake was a grinning gargoyle's head, a stone facsimile of the Djar Li god, Kitz'rn Xtla'trun. At the bottom of the stake were dry fagots, and fifty feet away at the campfire a naked medicine chief, painted crimson from head to toe and glaring white around his eyes, was lighting the sacrificial torch. At least a hundred other Djar Li tribesmen had remained to see the spectacle—particularly Xlar'nr Marna'ri's most savage captain, Qut'lun Rux'nr.

After the defeat and rout of the red troops, the main body of the Djar Li had returned toward Xlar'ri's headquarters at Wur'tzoon. Xlar'nr Marna'ri had added insult to injury by not even considering ten thousand

Serin Ni warriors as worthy of his personal attention. He had merely dispatched five thousand mounted troops to take care of the situation, and now Djik'ri's troops lay dead among the dunes or in hiding among the foothills, waiting in vain to be joined by their king.

Djik'ri was thankful for his long, blue hair, for now he could toss it over his face to hide the tears that filled his eyes—tears of rage, frustration and regret. Not for himself, but for his people—and his lost sister, Mnir'sr Nikinra.

Now it was true that his forces at Inis'dur could not be rejoined by the troops he had taken with him. And he wondered at the prophetic accuracy of Gon'ri the Warrior, who had pleaded with him not to follow this plan, for the very reasons which had now become self-evident.

There was much his people had yet to learn about warfare, no matter how superior their weapons. Bazookas and grenades were good weapons against masses of troops and fortifications and ships, but out here in the endless desert they were merely a burden where the enemy was widely deployed and mounted on fast, fighting ban'thorns.

Djik'ri gritted his teeth. Why had he not realized that this would be a different kind of battle! What a fool he had been to bring foot soldiers into the desert!

If he only had the wisdom of his old friend and benefactor, Gurund Ritroon! Like when he had received his message at sea, through Djur Djinri. That alone had won him a solid bridgehead in Bidjar Tan, which was now jeopardized by his own ill-fated strategy.

He trembled in his despondency over failing to rescue Mnir'ra and over the fact that he could not rejoin Djur Djinri at Inis'dur. And he

could only pray that Gurund Ritroon would guide Djur Djinri again in some miraculous way to save the entire race from defeat in the midst of precarious victory.

Then, of a sudden, he thought hard about something that had not occurred to him before. If Gurund Ritroon had spoken through Djur Djinri, perhaps he could speak through others! He remembered his struggle with Gon'ri at the castle, more than a moon ago. Surely it was not Gon'ri who had pleaded with him not to sacrifice his troops in battle with the Djar Li! *Again, it had been Gurund Ritroon—and he had not recognized the fact!*

Suddenly, in the midst of discouragement and hopelessness, Djikn Kinri took new courage. An air of the miraculous now seemed to lay across the land. Fate was no longer apathetic and blind. Fate moved with the eyes of the Avenger! There might still be a chance! It did not matter what happened to his own person. Gurund Ritroon was still with the Serin Ni!

SO IT WAS that as Qut'lun Rux'nr and his scarlet medicine man approached him with the death torch, they saw before them a figure straight and proud, with chin up, nostrils dilated, and black eyes glistening with defiance.

"I would send a message to your chief," said Djik'ri haughtily. "Tell him—"

"Silence!" shouted Zut'lun Rux'nr. He supported the point of his spear against Djik'ri's naked abdomen. "There is but one message Xlar'ri the Strong wishes me to bring—the eloquent message that will be contained in your ashes, brought to Wur'tzoon as a wedding gift in the stone head of Kitz'rn Xtla'trun!"

"But I—"

The spear point gouged him deeply and brought a dark rivulet of blood out upon his body.

"Light the fagots!" said Qut'lun to the medicine man.

The other warriors crowded in closer now to watch, while the tethered ban'thorns set up a weird, dry cackling behind the nearby dunes—a sound that was like the distant laughter of Death.

Djik'ri bit his lip in his pain and yet watched, fascinated, as the fire leapt into life about his feet. The scarlet medicine man began his incantations, leaping and howling about the rising flames, while the tribesmen answered back in a chorus.

Djik'ri felt a searing heat envelop his legs, and smoke began to make him gag. His eyes burned and his heart was a leaden weight in his chest—a weight of longing and desperation.

"Gurund Ritroon, Son of Gur, the Avenger!" he shouted above all the chanting and above the cackling of the ban'thorns. "Speak to me now before I die, so that I may know you are with us, as of old!"

The tribesmen heard him, and for a moment they were silent, listening intently—for the fame of Gurund Ritroon had reached these desert fastnesses across the Barrier Sea in the days when he yet lived in Serin Gor—and the Djar-Li were superstitious, credulous of the enemy's gods as well as their own.

But only the cackling of the ban'thorns answered out of the surrounding gloom, and soon the medicine man continued his dancing and incantations in triumph, while Djik'ri came near to fainting in the heat and smoke.

"Wait!" shouted Qut'lun suddenly. "Listen!"

Again they all listened, and this time they noticed that the cries of

their ban'thorns seemed to be more distant.

"*Ai-i-i!*" screamed one of Qut'lun's men. "They flee! Look!"

Across the tops of distant dunes they discerned the shadows of their ban'thorns, fleeing in terror. And suddenly there appeared in the light of the campfire a frightening being mounted on a powerful, ferocious ban'thorn. He was a tall, broad-shouldered warrior wearing a red cloak and a red mask, and his head was topped by a gleaming helmet of steel. On his back were a crossbow and a double quiver of arrows. In his left hand he held a broad shield, and in his right was a long, glistening weapon for which they had no name, but which dripped already with the blood of the sentries who had opposed him.

"Who are you?" demanded Qut'lun Rux'nr, futilely raising his spear.

For answer, the red-cloaked figure galloped down upon him and severed his arm from his shoulder with the great steel weapon he wielded. As Qut'lun shrieked in horror and agony and writhed on the ground in a spreading pool of blood, the other Djar Li made a concerted rush for their weapons. And in the meantime the scarlet medicine man was beheaded.

More strokes of the invincible weapon scattered the burning fagots in all directions, while the mighty ban'thorn's gryphon-like body reared in its excitement and its sharp-beaked hawk's head uttered a shrill, piercing rattle.

Before the Djar Li savages could organize themselves for a counter attack, the spectacular intruder had released Djikn Kinri and was bearing him away at a gallop into the night-shrouded wilderness at the desert. The Djar Li could not follow because their mounts had fled. The stranger with

the red mask had seen to that....

THE DJAR LI did not build cities, inasmuch as they did not believe in having their possessions anchored down to one location. Moreover, the principle conflicted with their basic instincts. They were nomads by nature, farming when necessary, sometimes living in one locality for several moons, just long enough to harvest a crop, then moving on again to find better grazing lands along the foothills for their herds of *cuir'laths*, from which they obtained wool, hides and meat. They also indulged in the mining of precious metals and precious stones and were artisans, their principal trade being with the Bidjar Ri and secondly with the wild and unpredictable Srul'ku Djii, or Upland Dwellers, who brought them rare herbs and miraculous medicines from the unknown wildernesses beyond the mountains.

Other tribes among the Djar Li nation, somewhat more settled by nature, adhered to the shores of Ces'son Nar and developed the art of commercial fishing. These tribes had built the Djar Li fleet. But all tribes recognized a common heritage: the desert lands beyond Bidjar Tan, a pride in their self-sufficiency, and a hatred of the cities. Owing to the necessity of collective security, they had, through their various chieftains, become verbally federated into a nation under the strong-armed leadership of Xlar'nr Marna'ri.

Ever since the factual agreement had been established between the Djar Li and the Bidjar Ri concerning their mutual designs upon Serin Gör, Xlar'ri's camp had remained at Wur'tzoon, a seasonal marketing headquarters at the foot of the mountains. At this time it was teeming with over three thousand inhabitants, a

sprawling city of black tents composed mostly of treated *cuir'lath* hides. And many were the paths that had been established between Wur'tzoon and other tribal camps nearby, because in these unpredictable times Xlar'ri the Strong wanted to have as many warriors on tap as possible. In three days he could muster ten thousand. In fifteen days, fifty thousand.

Djar Li Tan had never before been challenged by an invader because it could not, theoretically, be taken by surprise. Sentries widely dispersed through the mountains could detect approaching forces on the desert in ample time for defense preparations.

For these reasons, the easy victory over the specially equipped troops of Djikn Kinri had become the occasion for great celebration in Wur'tzoon, which had continued now for twenty days since the battle on the desert and which was reaching its climax as Xlar'ri's marriage to Mnir'sr Nikinra approached.

XLAR'NR MARNA'RI sat back on his cushions, wine cup in hand, and watched Mnir'ra intently while she observed without interest the frenzied efforts of the dancers and acrobats to entertain her. He had provided her with maidservants and all the beautifying facilities that could possibly have been expected by a queen. She had bathed in perfumed and medicated springwaters brought especially for her from the mountains. Her long, blue hair had been brushed; combed and decorated with flowers and costly jewels, and her body had been clothed in a diaphanous cloth woven of the rare, silk-like wool of the *gr'zan*, a timid creature of the uplands. It was a material that gave a woman the feeling of being exquisitely dressed, yet which did not sacrifice the revelation of all natural endowments of beauty—a sartorial compro-

mise which was as important to any female of the planet Gra'ghr, as it was to the females of all space and time. And where Mnir'ra was concerned it was of principal importance to Xlar'nr Marna'ri, who had never seen such a perfect figure as hers.

"If you do not brighten up pretty soon," he said to her, with a gentle smile that was topped by a sinister gleam in his eyes, "I am going to have to adopt a more practical method of approach. Am I actually mistaken in having assumed you were intelligent enough to be reasoned with?"

"Who are you to speak of intelligence or reason?" she retorted. "On the one hand you offer me your dream of a united world, a brotherhood of green and red men, and on the other you mercilessly destroy a mission of my own people sent out to negotiate for my return to them! You refuse to answer me concerning the fate of my brother. For all I know you may have ordered his execution if he has been captured—or he may be dead already. And you presume to place our relationship on a romantic basis? What do you think my emotions are? Shapeless clay that you may mold at will?"

Xlar'ri expanded his great chest and laughed. "By Xtla'trun! You should be a priestess or a diplomat! To call ten thousand armed men a mission!"

"Yes!" insisted Mnir'ra hotly. "If my brother had intended to invade your country, do you think he would have brought such an inadequate force?"

"Yes, I do. That's all he could spare." Xlar'ri leaned forward suddenly and glared at her. "These are matters of war. A subject for warriors. You are a frail, delicate woman. Your fate is entirely in my hands. So we will discuss the battle no fur-

ther. And I will *tell* you what is in store for you. Tomorrow you are to become my wife! Whether or not it pleases you to contemplate the future possibility of ruling this whole world with me is immaterial. You will obey me, so you may make the most of it!"

Mnir'ra smiled. "My lord is premature in his self-esteem. You can only understand that my brother's forces sent out against you have been repulsed, that they are perhaps leaderless and disorganized. You cannot know the full extent of their casualties, or whether the survivors still number one thousand or nine thousand. Their temporary defeat does not mean that they cannot be banded together again, once leadership has been reestablished."

Xlar'ri sipped his wine casually. "I have always considered boastfulness to be the outward signal of inferiority," he said. "And inasmuch as I do not feel inferior, I have no need to indulge in such demonstrativeness. I can only say that if your brother—or anyone else—were to reorganize the Serin Ni troops we have just defeated, there would be no one who would relish meeting their challenge more than myself."

Suddenly Mnir'ra moved to Xlar'ri's side and placed her small, pinkish hand on his green forearm. He threw away his cup instantly and put his arm around her, which she disdained to notice.

"Xlar'ri," she said earnestly, "if they approach again, show them the smoke of truce! Give me back to them and prove to me that you mean what you say—that you really want a united world!"

He fondled her rounded chin and admired her hair. "You forget that I'll not give you up for anything—for peace, victory, or the planet itself. So it is for you to decide, my

sweet. If they return I will show them the sign of truce, as you wish. But you must tell them that you are remaining here—that you are establishing the precedent—that you so love the world of Gra'ghr that you will marry a green man to prove that our races may be united. That I shall eventually conquer the planet myself, in order to insure an enduring peace, is a minor detail, of course, which you may relegate to another day."

He kissed her, and she found no way of escaping from his herculean embrace....

AT THAT moment the ground trembled and the blast of an explosion ripped half the great tent into tatters which smouldered and smoked in ruins. Some of the guards and entertainers were killed or wounded, while others ran outside shouting or shrieking, only to take off in new directions as further explosions occurred all over the tent city of Wur'tzeon.

As Xlar'ri pushed Mnir'ra aside and leapt to his feet, they both heard the cry of the Djar Li rising about them.

"*The Serin Ni!*"

Mnir'ra leapt to her feet, elated, but Xlar'ri grasped her arm fiercely. "Is this the kind of smoke your people want?" he asked. "If it is, I'll give it to them!"

He called for his guards and some returned, fearfully, to receive his orders. "Fetch me Grat'ri and Pol'dri and Scan'tlur!" he shouted, calling for his officers. "And get me fetters for this female! She is to be held here until I attend to these redskins!" When Pol'dri came running in, crossbow in hand and blood streaming down his face, Xlar'ri shouted, "How many are there? How did they get this far without raising an alarm?"

Pol'dri was a warrior, but he was not immune to superstition. What he

had seen and heard had rounded his eyes with excitement and amazement.

"There are thousands of them!" he exclaimed. "They came through the mountains secretly, by night, and killed our sentries as they advanced!"

Xlar'ri's green countenance darkened. "Can you tell who leads them?" he asked, buckling on his armor and shield which attendants had brought.

"Two there are who lead, Xlar'ri. One is Djikn Kinri himself—"

"Djikn! But—"

"No, he was not executed. He was rescued. Word came to us only a few minutes ago by a runner from Djez'nur that Qut'lun is dead!"

"Djik'ri lives!" exclaimed Mnir'ra. "Thank Gur, he lives!"

"Silence!" shouted Xlar'ri. "You say there are two leaders, Pol'dri. Who is the other?"

"We know not, but he is mighty. It is he who rescued Djikn Kinri and reorganized his troops. He wears a red mask and wields a terrible new weapon against which our spears and cudgels are useless!"

"Then shoot him down! Where is our counter-fire?"

"It is being readied. The stranger says that all he wants is Mnir'sr Nikinra. He has come for her!"

A burning hope was rising in Mnir'ra's breast. She hardly dared to breathe.

Divining her thoughts, Xlar'ri asked, "Do you think he has returned? Is it—"

"No. It could not be Gurund Rit-roon. This man is green!"

"What! A green man leading the Serin Ni?"

"Yes, and we must hurry! Their numbers are great!"

"Send to Djez'nur for reinforcements. In the meantime, I will meet this Red Mask myself!"

Mnir'ra, now bound by chains to

the central tent pole, sank to the ground, torn between despair and elation.

Who could this stranger be? A green man—helping her people, fighting shoulder to shoulder beside her brother—demanding nothing but her release? Red Mask, she thought. Could the green of him also be a mask?

CHAPTER XII

Pandora's Box

DJIKN KINRI had so far heard Flan'ri the Silent speak only a few words. Silently, he had helped him round up the enemy's ban'thorns and lead them to his scattered troops. Silently, he had led them through the mountains, directing them to travel only by night. By the time they neared the heights overlooking Wur'tzoon they had become almost wholly reorganized, numbering nearly five thousand men, hundreds of whom still carried bazookas and grenades.

And by this time, Djik'ri had ceased trying to get him to talk. He cared not who he was. In fact, he reminded him so much of Gurund Rit-roon in his dynamic self-assurance that he sometimes wondered if he were not the living instrument of his old friend and benefactor.

When they finally opened fire on Wur'tzoon, Flan'ri led a charge of mounted red men into the tent city and Djik'ri rode beside him. They threw grenades into the faces of Djar Li infantry and shot their arrows into more distant contingents who were attempting to open fire with bazookas. There was also hand to hand combat with spears and cudgels. But always, Flan'ri's great sword swept onward through all opposition, severing spear shafts, arms and necks, splitting hel-

metals and skulls and even killing ban'thorns.

The camp had obviously been taken by surprise. It was outnumbered and they were gaining. How they were to escape unscathed from Djar Li Tan was yet another question, but just now Djikn Kinri did not worry about that. There was something about his red-masked companion that gave him the old courage that he had known when Gurund Ritroon was alive. He seemed to surround them all with an aura of invincibility.

"Long live Serin Gor!" shouted his men, as they battled with the Djar Li.

It was then that a large contingent of mounted Djar Li charged them, led by Xlar'ri the Strong. And in the same moment Flan'ri spurred his mount forward to meet the Djar Li chieftain, head on.

There ensued a battle which kept Djik'ri almost too occupied to witness the duel between these two, yet he knew that in the first encounter Xlar'ri's heavy spear had knocked Flan'ri from his mount. He saw him get to his feet and raise his sword and shield as Xlar'ri charged again.

Then an arrow suddenly pierced Djik'ri's left arm and he was faint with pain. He faltered, and his own men pressed on beyond him into the howling, clashing night. A grenade exploded nearby and he was blown from his mount, to be trampled under the claws of other ban'thorns. He lay face down, suspended half way between consciousness and oblivion, while the sounds of battle grew dim in his ears....

FLANNIGAN swung his sword just in time to deflect Xlar'ri's spear, but in the next instant the ferocious chief was on top of him, tripping him off his feet, grappling with him on

the ground with arms of steel. He rolled, bucked, turned, and blocked a dagger thrust. There was a moment in which both men were mutually blocked by the power of brute strength alone. Then Flannigan lunged free and got to his feet, sword in hand once more. In the same moment, a riderless ban'thorn plunged by and he swung to its back. A solid phalanx of pressing men and ban'thorns pushed him onward, and Xlar'ri was lost in the darkness.

Minutes later, he found the remains of Xlar'ri's tent. The Serin Ni surrounded it, fighting off repeated attacks, but they let Flannigan and his ban'thorn through. Torchlight revealed Mnir'ra to him. She was on her feet, looking at him. He saw wonderment in her eyes change to instinctive distrust as she observed the color of his powerful arms; then back to wonderment again as she saw his bloodied sword.

"Where is my brother?" she asked.

Flannigan did not reply. He was looking at her hair and the flowers in it, and at her incomparable little body, glorified rather than concealed by her clinging, diaphanous costume. Then, too, there was the wonder of her eyes. But he forced himself to attend to practical matters for the moment, because he doubted very much that he would ever be in a position to benefit by the love she held for Gurund Ritroon.

He noticed the iron ring around her ankle, and the heavy chains. His sword could not sever them. He suddenly spurred his mount forward and made it press its shoulder against the tent pole. Many of the supporting ropes had been severed by the explosion, and the pole started to lean. The ban'thorn cackled and dug its talons into the soil, straining every muscle, until the ground swelled and cracked

in front of the pole and it toppled over.

Flannigan dismounted and slipped the chains off the pole. Then he swept Mnir'ra's warm, supple form into his arms and remounted.

"Who are you?" she asked. "How is it a green man has come to the side of the Serin Ni?"

For answer, he merely held her tighter and turned toward the wavering wall of battling men that surrounded them. Before she could think of anything to say or do, the wall of battling men burst asunder, and Xlar'ri came through on a ban'thorn, with a bloodied cudgel in his hand.

"Wur'tzoon is surrounded!" he said triumphantly. "Fortunately, trouble was suspected in Djez'nur when Qut'lun was reported dead, and troops have arrived just in time! So give yourself up, Red Mask! I want to know who you are. Not even Gon'ri the Warrior could fight as you have fought this night!"

In Flannigan's arms, Mnir'ra was crying. So he said to her, in a low voice, "Do not lose hope while I live!"

"But we are defeated!" she cried wearily. "The struggle is too great!"

THEN IT was, in that precise moment, when Fate overturned the whole world of Gra'ghr.

"Look!"

The cry arose simultaneously from the throats of red men and green men alike, and all fighting stopped. Xlar'ri, Flannigan and Mnir'ra looked. They looked upward into the starless night sky. Only purple Ral, the farther moon, cast an eerie light upon the object which had attracted everyone's attention.

Instantly, Flannigan recognized it for what it was, yet so incongruous did it appear in the skies of this primitive world that he had to struggle to

believe his senses.

It was a space ship, round as a ball, floating serenely above them, sweeping the area of Wur'tzoon with two powerful searchlights.

"What miracle is that?" said Mnir'ra forgetting the tears that streaked her face.

Now Flannigan's scalp prickled as he remembered Karj'ri, the High Priest of Zich'yeh, and his insistence upon turning to the Secret Gods. Karj'ri was dead, but Nr'im Kun'ri wasn't. He recalled scraps of past conversations with Karj'ri:

"The two god-men were tricked, and they and their *deadly ships* were locked forever in the temples, where they have remained to this day. The temples of the Secret Gods are here. One of them lies far up in the wild mountain reaches of Bidjar Tan. The other is in the still more remote Hills of the Sky. To be slaves again to those gods would be the lesser of two evils. At least we would be safe from our enemies."

Just then a purplish beam of light shot downward from the space ship and a small section of Wur'tzoon went "*Phit-t*—like a giant flash bulb.

Flannigan swung his mount about and cut down the torches with his sword, casting them into a relative darkness that was relieved mostly by the distant flames rising from the section where the purple ray had hit.

Again the purple ray stabbed out, this time uncomfortably close, and another section of Wur'tzoon went "*Phit-t*". A wave of heat swept against them, and green and red men stampeded, shouting hysterically.

"What is it?" insisted Mnir'ra. "We'll be killed if we stay here!"

"Xlar'ri!" he called.

The latter, who had remained as motionless as he, looking up at the ship, now turned to look at Flannigan. Swiftly, he drew his mount closer.

"What do you know of this?" he demanded of Flannigan.

"I know that it consists of an evil menace that threatens green men and red men alike with eternal slavery. The appearance of that ship binds us all together in the common interests of survival, not of one race or another, but of an entire world. We must evacuate Wur'tzoon at once! Run for the mountains. I'll be waiting there for you. When you join me, bring with you the most authoritative priests you can find. I have something to reveal to you that you would not believe unless they confirmed it. Now, run for it!"

"Wait!" said Xlar'ri, barring Flannigan's path with his cudgel. "What about Mnir'sr Nikinra?"

Flannigan hesitated. Then: "What about her?"

"She is mine!"

Flannigan jabbed his ban'thorn's ribs and galloped away. "By what law?" he shouted back. "We'll be waiting for you—in the hills!"

IT WAS a night of madness, reminding Flannigan of his early childhood imaginings of what it must have been like on the night of the biblical Flood. Mixed races of people mingled with stampeding ban'thorns and cuir'laths, animals and humans alike struggling in the common cause of survival, unconditionally bound together by necessity and driven by the whip-lash of instinctive fear—the indescribable kind that grips your legs and your heart when an earthquake strikes.

It reminded him also of H. G. Wells' "War of the Worlds" in its basic, original terror—terror even for him, who had come here from a world that had already hurled its first rocket to the Moon. Flannigan had devoured science-fiction in his youth, and the concept of extra-terrestrial life came

easily to him. But this unknown Nemesis above them was not fiction. It was sheer blood-curdling reality.

He knew that no green man's hand manipulated the controls of that ship. Karj'ri had spoken of two "god-beings" who had been the masters of his race in ages past. One of them was free of his ancient prison. He was up there now, an alien *thing* out of the unknowable reaches of time and space, sneering at them, casting down thunderbolts and devastation upon his inferiors, determined to frighten them into unquestioning obedience.

Nr'im Kun'ri had opened a Pandora's box and its evil was upon them all. But there was one possibility of salvation that loomed up in Flannigan's thoughts. In this particular case, Pandora had *two* boxes!

If he, himself, could find the other one—maybe he could do a little fumigating before taking the lid off entirely. And some of its contents might prove very useful.

"Mnir'ra," he said to the girl in his arms.

"Yes?" She did not question his right to use the familiar form of her name. "Where are the Hills of the Sky?"

"I've never heard of them."

Flannigan looked upward at the amorphous, deeper darkness of the mountains. He knew they were the gateway to unknown territory. And he wondered:

"What is your name?" asked Mnir'ra.

"Flan'ri."

"Full name?"

"Flanin'gan Kinri."

"Its strangeness is compatible with yourself. I shall call you Flan'ri. Now, may we look for my brother? Where did you last see him?"

"Back in Wur'tzoon. We have a prearranged meeting place. If he lives—"

"If he lives!" She straightened up, suddenly rigid.

"He fought. He could have been hit. We will not know until—"

A great shout of relief suddenly shook the air. He heard it echoing from near and far among the ravines and across the ridges. He and Mnir'ra looked at the sky. The space ship was gone....

"Why did you tremble just then?" asked Mnir'ra.

Flannigan said nothing, but he was thinking. If this had happened to Wur'tzoon, than what of Inis'dur—and Rurz'tlid, the capital of Serin Gor!

Instinctively, he clutched Mnir'ra closer to him. Sensing something she could not define, she remained very quietly where she was. And Flannigan peered upward again into the dark enigma that was the land of the Srul'ku Djii, the Upland Dwellers....

CHAPTER XIII

Gurund Ritroon

WHEN IT was considered safe to build a campfire, the unprecedented conference in the mountains got under way. The flickering orange light of it illuminated a sea of tense, wary faces—red and green alike. Never in their history, since cataclysm had chased them into the Lens, had they been together like this.

But Flannigan did not like the general atmosphere. It was laden with explosive potentials, like a cage full of lions and tigers. And he was deliberately assuming the role of tamer.

Xlar'ri appeared, followed by an older man who was obviously a high priest—an evil-looking fellow with the cunning gleam of the ferret in his narrowed eyes, and who looked at him with a challenging distrust.

"Speak quickly!" commanded Xlar'ri, unwilling to yield leadership to

Flannigan. "I have brought Shil'drn Zaarg'dri, High Priest of both Xtla'trun and Zich'yeh, Guardian of the Ancient Mysteries. What is it you have to tell?"

Flannigan stood on the ground before the fire, leaning on the hilt of his great sword, while Mnir'ra rested in a sitting position beside him. "Then Shil'drn Zaarg'dri can tell you as much as I," he replied. "Let him tell you of the *Secret Gods*!"

At these words, Shil'drn Zaag'dri's eyes widened for one split second, then narrowed with a sudden menace. "There are no high gods but Kitz'rn Xtla'trun and Zich'yeh!" answered the priest. "If there be any secret gods they are unworthy of our attention. I know nothing of them. But I do know that this red-masked one is responsible for the thing in the sky that has devastated our dwelling places! Seize him!"

Mnir'ra gasped in amazement and fright, looking up at her strange guardian apprehensively. Flannigan did not move a muscle. He merely watched Xlar'ri, who in turn measured the multitude around him. Thousands of red men and green men surrounding the meeting place were armed for battle. He did not choose to precipitate a useless struggle.

"Obviously," said Flannigan to Xlar'ri, "this priest is concealing the truth from you, for personal reasons."

"Why should he do that?" asked Xlar'ri.

Flannigan quickly told them, then, the whole legend of the Secret Gods, while the priest smiled through it all, derisively, as though listening to a fairytale.

"So you see," Flannigan concluded, "Nr'im Kun'ri has succeeded in releasing one of the Secret Gods upon us. By so doing, he has gained favor with this super-being for the priesthood of Bidjar Tan. Naturally, the

priesthood of Djar Li Tan knows exactly what has occurred, and they hope to release the other Secret God in time to gain themselves favor, also. Favor, that is, over and above the common people. That is why Shil'drn Zaarg'dri denies any knowledge of this and pretends to be "amused." Flannigan played another long shot: "Perhaps he would not be so amused if he knew that I have already sent forces to overtake his priests before they reach the Hills of the Sky!"

He had sent out no such forces, and he was not even certain of the location of Pandora's Box Number Two, but the effect upon the high priest was immediate. He simply drew his dagger and threw it, expertly, straight at Flannigan's forehead.

Flannigan ducked with surprising swiftness and the sharp instrument of death clattered among rocks behind him. A shout went up, which was topped by the priest's own voice.

"Seize him!" he shrieked. "He is a deadly spy in our midst!"

But Xlar'ri was still in command. He shouted everybody into silence.

Then he said, "What is your counter-proposal—assuming that we would believe your story?"

Flannigan braced himself. "Once you trapped these god-beings. Nr'im Kur'ri was wrong to presume that they would be benevolent again. As you can see, the one released as purely out for vengeance and unquestioning obedience. To release the second one, or to permit the first one to release him, would be only to insure the complete enslavement of us all. I submit that our only salvation is to enslave god number two and cause him to destroy the other one!"

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed the high priest. "And who is going to make a slave of such a being?"

"I am!"

The whole mountainside of warriors

and women and children fell silent as they looked down upon that dynamic red-masked figure by the fire. And Mnir'ra began to stare at him with renewed wonderment.

"You are!" exclaimed Xlar'ri. "Who are you to presume—"

"I may fail," said Flannigan. To his listeners, his voice seemed to grow deep and mighty. "But there is none among you more qualified to try."

"Just a moment!"

Everyone was startled to see the bloodied figure of a Serin Ni warrior stagger into the firelight to Mnir'ra's side. To stand up at all was obviously costing him a great effort, for an arrow protruded from one arm.

"Djik'ri!" screamed Mnir'ra, leaping to her feet. She tried to make him sit down, but he resisted her, never taking his eyes from Flannigan. So she tore her thin garment, shamelessly uncovering her breasts, to make a bandage for him to stop the bleeding of his wound.

"I want to tell them who you are!" he shouted. "I know now why you saved my life back near Djez'nur, in the desert. Without me you could not have used my troops against Xlar'nr Marna'ri! You could not have hoped to recapture my sister!"

"Re-capture!" exclaimed Xlar'ri.

"Yes!" cried Djik'ri. "Don't you recognize his voice?" With an amazing flick of his good arm, he caused his spear point to scrape Flannigan's face, and the red mask was torn from his head.

No one there present—especially Mnir'ra—would ever forget the numbing shock of beholding that famous, hideous face with its livid scars and its single, lidless eye.

"Gon'ri!" came the universal shout of the multitude—and Xlar'ri gripped his cudgel in grim readiness.

Only Mnir'ra, of them all, noticed a sudden glistening of Gon'ri's remaining

eye as he turned it upon her. But she could not imagine that her most despised enemy was capable of tears—tears of epic sorrow. She could only stare back at him speechlessly for a moment. Then she fainted.

"I told you!" shouted Shil'drn Zaarg'dri in triumph. "Gon'ri himself seeks favor with the Secret Gods—or worse than that, he hopes to dominate the entire planet by using their powers against us!"

As Xlar'ri slowly approached him, followed by a solid phalanx of his warriors, Flannigan acted....

HE LEAPED to the top of a great boulder behind him, sword and shield in hand.

"You will listen to me!" he shouted in a surprisingly stentorian tone. "Graghr is threatened with destruction and slavery! I am your only salvation! Follow me to the Hills of the Sky and you will have a chance!"

"Down with Gon'ri!" shouted the Serin Ni.

"Death to the Emperor!" shouted the Djar Li.

But Flannigan outshouted them again. "Gon'ri is dead!" he yelled. "Nr'im Kun'ri assassinated him! I only wear his body." A hush fell over the surging mass of warriors. "For mine lies—*beyond the Lens!*"

Djik'ri tensed. Cold sweat suddenly sprang out on his forehead. He recalled Djur Djinri's message at sea before the rocket batteries at Inisdur—and the episode in the castle.

"Gurund Ritroon!" he cried in dismay.

"Yes, Djik'ri! This is my accursed fate, to serve you in the form of our mutual enemy! Now, follow me if you cherish life and freedom!"

"Gurund Ritroon!" shouted the Serin Ni incredulously. "He has returned!"

Xlar'ri shouted back, "Are you

fools? What other ruse could Gon'ri possibly use to save his skin under these circumstances? It is easy to claim that one wears the body of another! I could do it myself! Behold! I am Gurund Ritroon! Ha! Don't be idiots! This madman must die!"

Whereupon he hurled his cudgel so powerfully at Flannigan that its impact against his shield knocked him from the boulder. To everyone's surprise, however, Flannigan turned and picked up that boulder, which no man should have been able to lift, and this he hurled at Xlar'ri. The latter ducked, but the boulder crushed half a squad of green men to death behind him.

Flannigan shouted silently to himself in triumph. The old god-power was coming back! The Lens was awakening! Once more, he was truly Gurund Ritroon, Son of Gur!

DJKIN KINRI clutched at his wound and sank down beside the prostrate form of his sister, but he cried out to his men: "Follow him!"

A cry of approval arose from the red ranks, but simultaneously Xlar'ri signalled his men to the attack. A milling, confused, disorganized battle ensued, and in its midst Xlar'ri and a picked platoon of Djar Li warriors charged Flannigan.

The latter discarded his red cloak and faced them with his sword. "Stand where you are!" he commanded Xlar'ri. "There has been enough of killing on this planet! If you fight now you will accomplish nothing but your own destruction!"

Xlar'ri hesitated, glaring at Flannigan with a burning concentration, visibly torn between aggressive instinct and native suspicion. Flannigan espied an abandoned Djar Li shield lying near the campfire, at the feet of a large ban'thorn. He ran to the shield and held it up for all to see.

"Gra'ghr must be one—like this!" he shouted. "But you would make it *this*!" Whereupon he tossed the shield into the air, and as it fell he swung his sword in an almost invisible arc.

The blow cut the tough shield neatly in two....

A shout of triumph arose from the red men. They had no doubt now that Gurund Ritroon was really with them. Xlar'ri turned to his men and spoke a low command. Immediately, gourds piped a signal to all green men and the fighting in the hills subsided.

Xlar'ri said nothing more. He looked darkly at Flannigan, who had mounted the Ban'thorn. Then his eyes turned to Mnir'ra.

At the same time, a solid phalanx of Serin Ni fighters closed in about their wounded king and Mnir'ra, significantly. Xlar'ri turned on his heel and walked away.

"Guard them well," said Flannigan, "until I return!" Whereupon he turned his ban'thorn about and started climbing up the ravine.

He had not been fooled either by the seeming pacifism of Xlar'ri or the sudden disappearance of Shil'drn Zaag'dri. The former, he knew, would not give up so easily. The latter, by his swift departure, could not have announced his intentions more plainly.

For now, with the Avenger on their necks, they felt a vital need for their Secret Gods....

CHAPTER XIV

The Hills of the Sky

IN THE following four days, Flannigan outrode the contingent of red troops who had accompanied him. He also wore out his ban'thorn. The last of the four days he advanced on foot, deep into the highland country of the Srul'ku Djii. He remembered vaguely that he had eaten somewhere about a

day ago, and that the last water he had drunk had been hours before.

But he was vividly aware of, his goal. On this fourth morning he had seen, from afar, a little safari of green men wearing the black cloaks of the priesthood. These, he knew, were the secret emissaries of Shil'drn Zaag'dri.

He knew that they were not Srul'ku Djii, because the Upland Dwellers were an easily recognized separate species who were perhaps indigenous to the planet. They were smaller even than the Serin Ni, and wiry. They wore little clothing, never rode any species of animal—and their skin was rock gray. A perfect camouflage in this gray desolation.

The mountains here rose continuously into barren heights, and Flannigan felt that he must be at least at an altitude of ten thousand feet. The air was dry and the wind blew coldly off the glaciers that lay still above him. But these attitudes were as nothing compared to what he now saw plainly before him—escarpments that towered into blue haze, immeasurably high. An electric sign could not have marked them more clearly. These were the Hills of the Sky....

And up there, hidden somewhere in the timelessness of granite crags, was Pandora's *other* box!

He had a sense of being spied upon at all times. Part of this was due to the Srul'ku Djii, whose ever-receding figures he could make out in the distance. But more than the Upland Dwellers watched him, he knew.

Somewhere beyond the distant ridges, Xlar'ri's men were trying to keep pace with him. They were more powerful than the Serin Ni and had been in mountains before.

Relentlessly and almost tirelessly, Flannigan strode onward in his newly acquired strength. He kept hoping that the first space ship he had seen over Wur'tzoon would not appear to

oppose him—or to open the other prison of the Secret Gods before he could reach it.

He wondered about ancient Gur and the hidden meaning of the Lens, whence its timely power came and for what purpose fate had chosen him to be its instrument.

Whatever the explanation, he was going to need the power of the Lens more than ever before. When and if he succeeded in opening the second temple, it might turn out veritably to be a battle of the gods.

Who, or what, he asked himself, were these superior entities, and what were their purposes, their inclinations, their strengths and weaknesses—and their weapons?

Only time could tell....

HOURS PASSED while he slowly gained on the distant column of Djar Li priests. There were six of them. They had no doubt started out on ban'thorns, but now they were on foot, high above them, picking their way cautiously among narrow trails made by gentle gr'zans and their merciless, dreaded enemy, the karn-ger cat.

The four suns of Gra'ghr sank below the horizon, and night came swiftly, for Ral and Lan Ba'na were absent. The hilt of Flannigan's sword was like a bar of ice in his hand. The wind blew strongly, coldly, and it began to snow. Even his supernatural strength seemed insufficient now. The air was thinner, breathing was painful, and the trail grew ever steeper and more indistinct. And suddenly he was assailed by a terrible hunger. The priests above him had food and warmer clothing. He had not eaten in over a day, and his chest was encased in a cold, steel cuirass.

At what must have been fifteen thousand feet, he grew dizzy and fell. And at that moment Lan Ba'na arose

to reveal the mouth of a cave not ten feet away. He staggered toward it, intending to find shelter from the wind and snow, and perhaps to rest for a while.

But just then he heard behind him a reverberating growl, and he turned to face a giant karn-ger cat, the most dangerous beast on the planet. It was easy to discern its three ruby-red eyes, because they glowed in the dark, and moonlight glistened on its three rows of shark-like teeth as it opened its cavernous, toad-shaped mouth to roar. The huge hairless carnivore was returning to its lair, which Flannigan had been about to enter.

He faced it, raising his shield and sword to defend himself, remembering the curious little saying that Djik'ri the Hunter had once told him: "Three brave men will hunt a Zat, but none will face the karn-ger cat!"

He was facing one now, and he prayed for strength as the beast charged. He raised his shield high and swung his sword with all his strength. He felt a sickening pain along his thigh as talons raked him, but that was all. His sword severed the creature's spine, and it died in agony.

He looked down at his side and saw the dark bleeding of his thigh. Then he staggered into the cave and stumbled over a mat of branches—the "cat's" bed. He lay there and slowly lost consciousness....

WHEN HE awoke, a dim, gray dawn light was filtering in through a screen of branches half covered with snow. Somehow, the mouth of the cave had been camouflaged during the night. He reached down to feel the wound in his thigh.

The movement precipitated action. Something scurried to the cave mouth and tore away the branches.

Flannigan reached for his sword,

found it, and leapt to his feet, albeit with a terrible effort. His head felt as though it would split.

In the cave mouth he made out the small, gnomish figure of a Srul'ku Djii, a male member of the race, wearing gr'zan furs. The little fellow said nothing. Finally, as Flannigan did not threaten him, he turned toward the outside and emitted a curious howling sound.

At this signal, ten other gray, fur-clad gnomes came into view. The body of the karn-ger cat had been pulled into the cave. Now they grasped it by the hind legs and dragged it away.

"What do you want?" he asked.

For answer, the first gnome pointed to Flannigan's feet, and then he helped his companions pull the karn-ger cat away. Flannigan looked down and saw food and water, in two stone dishes. He asked no further questions, because it was all too clear.

They had thanked him in this way for killing their most dreaded enemy and providing them with meat. They probably even thought he was a great warrior for having slain the terror beast single-handed. They had, he finally noticed, even applied herbs to his wound. It had stopped bleeding and was clean.

He let them go their way in silence, while he ate and drank. But he wondered why they had covered the cave mouth. To protect him from the wind?

Then why protect the dead karn-ger cat?

He stopped eating.

Had they wanted to hide him and all signs of his presence from something during the night—or someone?

He stood up. That was it! Xlar'ri's men had passed this way while he lay here unconscious!

Gulping water and throwing aside the stone bowl, he left the cave and resumed his way up the escarp-

ment....

SOMEWHAT refreshed by food, water, rest and a mysterious replenishment of energy that he attributed to the Lens, he climbed the remaining portion of the trail rapidly. Rapidly, that is, under the circumstances, for the ever-thinning air made it necessary for him to stop every third of a mile to catch his breath. But there was no time to lose, so he continued upward.

And as he did so he took stock of his weapons. Armor, buckler, helmet and sword. A crossbow and arrows, plus his knife. All these might prove inadequate. But in a pouch at his belt he still carried three grenades. As he neared the top of the escarpment, he selected one of the latter and held it in readiness.

A furtive movement behind one of the crags above him convinced him his worst suspicions were valid. He had seen one green shoulder and a quiver of arrows. Xlar'ri's men had gotten ahead of him and dug in. Somewhere along the short stretch of narrow trail left to him, he might come into the firing range of a hidden bazooka.

So he flattened himself against the last low cliff and began to seek another route to the top. There were only toe holds, and slivers of rock above, to grip. He put his sword into its scabbard and fastened the grenade by its little hook to his belt. Then he edged carefully out over the cold abyss from which he had emerged. Below was mist. Far beyond was a blue reflection of sunlight—Ces'son Nar. He wondered if he would ever walk by its shores again. Certainly not with Mnir'ra. What chance was there of that? Even if Djik'ri convinced her of who he really was, he was still a green-skinned, disfigured nightmare. He knew it was best to forget about Mnir'ra—for her sake. And he also knew at the same time that it would

be impossible to forget about her.

He worked his way further along until he found himself facing a rock chimney, one of those shallow crevasses which time and nature sometimes create, adding character lines to the faces of great mountains. By bracing his body crosswise in it, he was able to "walk" upward, using legs, arms, stomach and back muscles plus a few inarticulated prayers. Finally when more handholds became available, he returned to the more practical procedure of climbing up one wall.

At last he looked over the top—and he saw, simultaneously, the second "temple" of the Secret Gods and Xlar'ri's men. The "temple" had been opened by the priests, and Xlar'ri's men, numbering about fifteen, held the trail with two bazookas and at least ten armed bowmen. They were waiting for him, but he had fooled them. He was a hundred feet to the left of the trail.

He looked at the "temple" again. Mostly, it was a towering pile of snow, ice, dirt and debris, but out of that pile emerged the imperishable metal dome that identified the whole "temple" as a space ship, apparently identical to the one that had appeared over Wur'tzoon. It was roughly five hundred feet in diameter.

Just then, one of the Djar Li bazookas sounded off, and he heard an explosion below him. When he looked below, he made out a contingent of Serin Ni warriors scrambling for cover. But there was no cover. And they had no bazookas.

FROM THAT point on, Flannigan did not remember the details very well, because he charged into the thick of the battle. And he moved fast.

Whenever he looked back upon this episode, it came to him in a series of impressions only. There was the ex-

plosion of his first grenade among the bowmen. Their torn bodies falling over the escarpment. Bazooka fire, whistling arrows, and at last swinging swords. He fought, severing or piercing anything that opposed him. But he did not go unscathed. An arrow pierced his leg. Another was buried in his groin. Cudgels struck him. There was blood and an awareness of being faint, but of swinging his sword through anything and everything—bodies, shields, helmets, spears, faces. It did not matter.

Then—all the green men were dead. All, that is, except the priests, or so it seemed. They were inside the space ship.

The next thing he remembered, he was dragging himself up the hill of rubble, toward the open door. Then he was inside, in an open air lock.

And there stood Xlar'nr Marna'ri, facing him with some kind of super-man weapon.

"Do you know what you are doing?" gasped Flannigan. "Forget pride and power Xlar'ri! This is too important! Listen to me! I know more about this than your priests!"

"Stand where you are!" said Xlar'ri. "You have just one minute to convince me. Speak the truth, Gon'ri, or I'll blast you into Eternal Darkness!"

One minute... It was the longest minute of Flannigan's life. A minute in which the destiny of a world teetered on the razor edge of inalterable decision.

"If your priests release this god-being, or whatever he is, there will be two of them—and you'll never be free." He talked with his mouth, but he prayed with everything else that was in him, while he slowly increased the grip on his sword. "But if you help me I can use this ship to overcome the other one—the one that attacked Wur'tzoon. Then the green races will possess the means of holding

the planet forever!"

He saw doubt in Xlar'ri's cold, penetrating eyes, and the muzzle of the strange weapon aimed at his heart.

In that instant, he hurled his sword and hit the deck. A searing blue ray of energy sparkled against the metal walls, turning them white hot on contact. But then Xlar'ri fell back with Flannigan's sword piercing his steel cuirass, clear to the hilt. He died without speaking another word.

Flannigan picked up the heat blaster and entered the ship, limping, leaving a trail of blood behind him.

CHAPTER XI

The Secret Gods

FLANNIGAN remembered spotless corridors, untouched by time. His impression was that the ship had been vacuum-sealed all this time. He passed through rooms filled with apparatus that was incomprehensible to him. And there was one large chamber, almost two hundred feet across, which contained at least the outlines of a beautiful garden, plus an empty pool. There had been plants and flowers, but they had shriveled and died in the vacuum.

Indirect lighting illuminated his way wherever he went, and he wondered how the priests had managed to activate the ship's power plant. He went searching for the control room.

Somewhere near the center of the ship he began to follow a curiously spiraling passage that curved ever inward. It finally led to a perfectly circular door. And the door was open.

Inside was a very dim twilight. He sensed that it was a fairly large chamber, perhaps fifty feet in diameter. Its floor was sunken, and steps led downward toward some dark object he could not make out. But in the center of that darkness a small blue light danced, like St. Elmo's fire over a

swampland.

He gripped his gun and began to advance toward the light, down the shallow steps. Something told him that if he were ever to be confronted with the mysterious inmate of this time-prison, it would be here. If that flickering, dancing, beckoning light meant that the second Secret God was coming to life, he was determined to snuff it out forever.

It was at that moment that the circular door slammed shut behind him. He turned swiftly and retraced his steps. He tried to find a way of opening the door, but he could not.

He turned his heat-blaster on it and the blue ray heated the door to blue whiteness, but it would not melt.

Then, an electrically transmitted voice spoke to him. It spoke in the tongue of Gra'ghr and in the accent of a Djar Li. He knew it was one of the priests.

"You claim to be Gurund Ritroon," said the priest. "Therefore, the chamber is suited to you. It is a prison of gods. But your cell-mate is awakening, Gurund Ritroon. He knows how to get out. Or perhaps, being a god, you may be able to get out yourself. But this we know: only one of you will emerge—not both. *That* god, Gurund Ritroon, will be our master!"

There was a "click!"—and Flannigan knew that the amplifier circuit was off. There was no way of communicating with the outside.

He was alone with a nameless darkness and a flickering flame. Something alien and powerful was coming to life, after eons of suspended animation, like an angry djinn in a bottle, and it would seek to wreak vengeance on the first living creature it would discover.

Flannigan was sore, beaten, bleeding. He stood there in the darkness, near to death, waiting...waiting....

THERE WERE twenty of the Serin Ni who topped the escarpment, and they lost no time in getting to the ship. Inside, they soon discovered the priests of Djar Li Tan and overcame them. But the leader of the priests laughed confidently. He told them what had happened to their Gurund Ritroon.

"Take us to that chamber!" demanded the Serin Ni Lieutenant who was in charge of the detail. "You will open it and release him at once!"

"We have foreseen such a circumstance," said the priest. "The outer mechanism of the door has been destroyed. It can only be opened from the inside now. And its secret is known only to the original occupant!"

"Then turn on the communicator of which you spoke. We will speak to Gurund Ritroon!"

The communicator was turned on and the lieutenant was about to speak, when they heard a sound that sent a ripple of fear up and down their spines.

It was the inhuman voice of the Secret God. He was shrieking with mad laughter....

MNIR'SR NIKINRA, daughter of Ankterna, sought eternal sleep in Zi'ilgar-lon, the Desert of Death. It was endless, that desert which lay beyond the green hills of Mag'dur in Serin Gor, a desolate wilderness filled with an endless maze of barren ridges of bluish rock, like slate. These ridges formed unscalable walls, and anyone losing his way here was lost forever. It was here the red men came when they tired of twice ten thousand years of life. This was the Walk Alone, that led to eternal sleep.

Mnir'ra had not seen twice ten thousand years of life. She had not seen ten thousand moons. But she was here, already lost and dying, already beyond

hunger or thirst or pain. She walked where Altinra, the ancient lover of Gur, had walked—into Eternity:

Taking only memory

Of love, like blossoms withered...

Yes, that was her last, lingering pain—her withered memory of love. If Gurund Ritroon had returned to her even in the body of Gon'ri the Warrior, she would have loved him. If she had only known that night in the hills of Djar Li Tan, above Wur'tzoon, that it was he, she would have told him that his disfigured face meant nothing. She loved him!

But he had gone into the Hills of the Sky without that knowledge, and that was the last of him. The first strange sky ship had conquered the planet and the second had been reported as having been seen over Bidjar Tan.

This was after she and Djikn Kinri had returned home to a conquered land. Life had lost all its meaning, and so she had started her journey into nothingness, leaving Serin Gor in blackest mourning.

Now, even her sentimental thoughts finally became subordinated to the contemplation of death. In the mounting heat of the desert she had little use for clothing, and as much of it had been torn when she walked through the beds of thorny bushes that often blocked her way, she finally discarded her last raiment.

She fluffed out her hair and made it lie neatly across her naked back. She straightened her shoulders and flaunted her youth and beauty at Fate; as though to say: If this is what I was born to, then let me be sacrificed on your altar—the altar of futility!

She considered the thought as the beginnings of delirium. To think that Fate could know compassion!

She stumbled, then, and fell. The hot sand burned her tender breasts and stomach and thighs, but she did not move.

Soon, however, she was aware of creeping things. The desert had turned to blood. Up out of the sand was emerging a countless mass of giant, blood-red insects, and they made a dry slithering sound with their mandibles.

She screamed, got to her feet, and ran. As she ran, they receded. But the exertion soon made her stumble and fall in exhaustion. And again the red death emerged out of the sands.

She got up, ran, stumbled, got to her feet again, then fainted. And the red horde of hungermad insects swarmed over her, biting, tearing, stripping the beauty from her with fiendish avidity.

PAIN BROUGHT momentary consciousness as she lay on her back looking upward. And in her delirium she thought she saw a strange being coming toward her. It had emerged from a great, round ship, and it was running swiftly. But such a being was impossible, so she knew it was a cruel, tantalizing mirage.

It was of godly proportions and beautiful to see, like the keeper of the gates to Eternity. For it was naked, sexless, and of shining gold.

It brushed the insects away and its hands were covered with the blood of her torn body—a body that was beyond hope now, even for a god.

But in spite of that he picked her up and rushed her into his ship. That much she remembered before she fainted again....

WHEN SHE finally regained consciousness, the fact that she should ever again see the light of day was, in itself, incredible. But that she should feel more alive and well than

she had ever felt before in her life was beyond comprehension. Her body felt light and airy, her mind as sharp as a knife.

She was looking up into the face of the golden god.

"What happened to Gurund Ritroon?" was her first question.

The golden god-face smiled. "He reached the second ship in the Hills of the Sky," he replied, in a voice that was equally golden. "There he discovered the secret of the Secret Gods—that all that ever existed of those ancient masters of the green men were their brains, encased in sealed containers. There were two of them, one in each ship. But the entire entity or thought-pattern of each brain could be transferred, electrically, to the imperishable brains of their marvelous robot bodies. This is one of those perfect robots you see before you.

"Gurund Ritroon discovered that the energies released by the priests of Djar Li Tan, which were designed to bring the master brain out of its suspended animation, were useless. Because too much time had passed. The real brain had disintegrated."

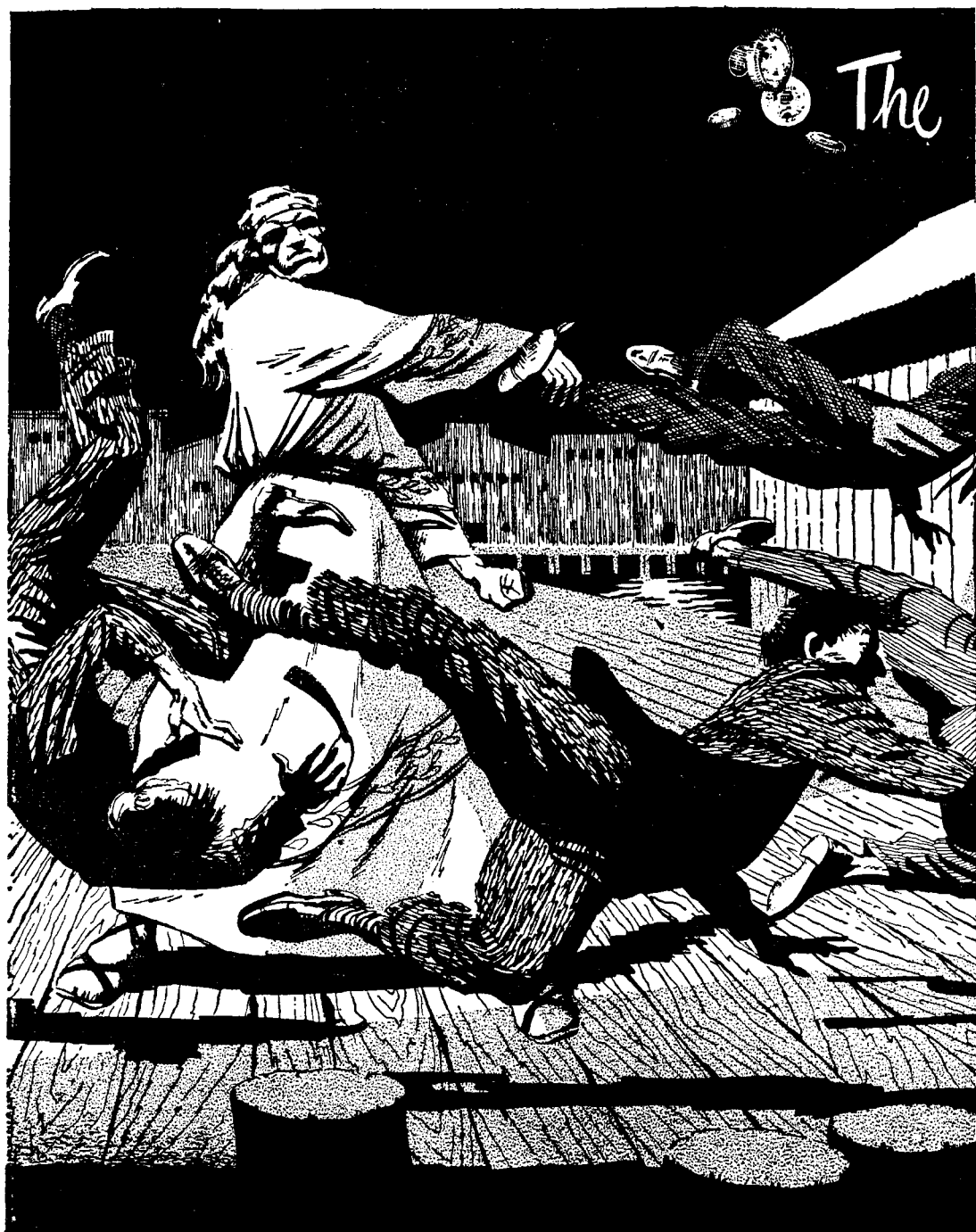
"Then who are you?"

Again the golden smile. "I am Flan'ri, alias Gon'ri the Warrior, alias Gurund Ritroon."

A wave of emotion should have engulfed Mnir'ra, but instead she was aware of peace—a beautiful calm and pleasure—a feeling that would last forever.

"My darling!" she exclaimed. "I can't believe—"

He raised his perfect hand. "Then hear me out," he said. "What was supposed to be transferred from that time-capsule into the synthetic brain of this robot I succeeded in transferring from Gon'ri's dying body. In short, I transferred myself! It was
(concluded on page 151)



With Reggie and the girl safely to one side, the giant D'Jinn went to work. His powerful arms scooped up Nolan and his two burly henchmen and sent them spinning across the wharf

MAN

WHO BOUGHT TOMORROW

By William P. McGivern



**Reggie paid a nickel for a
look at tomorrow's news . . .
and demanded a fast refund!**

THE SEQUENCE went about like this: A printing machine, in some unaccountable manner, fouled up an ad in one issue of a magazine called *True Astrology*.

A month later, a Chicago news vendor sat on a fruit crate beside his stand peering at this one particular copy of the magazine. His name was Creepy Brown, and he was a small, red-nosed little man, with narrow, alert eyes, thinning brown hair, and an impressive gift for self-delusion. Creepy was an optimist; he believed in astrology, in fortune tellers, in the exploiters of the occult—in anything, for that matter, that promised him a break, a train trip, a blonde, a pot of gold. Creepy, on this night, was reading one particular ad over and over,

his lips moving slowly, his forehead crinkling with effort. There was something wrong with the ad. Some of the words were strange to his eye. The ones he recognized offered a promise of help, but the sense of the message was destroyed by the unfamiliar words.

Still, it was exciting to roll those words on his tongue. They had a nice solid ring to them, and gave him a sense of power which he enjoyed without understanding.

Supposing someone should help him, he thought pleasantly. Wouldn't that be fine! But how? What did he really want? Girls? Money? Well, of course. But supposing he could have anything he wanted. What would it be?

Creepy's thoughts strayed along the horizon of his interests, on which loomed nothing so trivial as atom bombs, wars, and the state of the world. Standing prominently before all else was the forthcoming fight between Ace Nelson and Wild Billy Bell for the middle-weight championship of the world. That was it! If he could only know how that battle was going to turn out. What more could anybody want? Now, if someone would just tell him that little thing—or better still, let him see a copy of the newspapers after the fight. That would do it.

Smiling and rubbing his jaw, Creepy bent closer to the book and reread the ad in a clear, slow voice....

YOH-AGPARTH twitched in his century-old sleep, and caused a tremor that dislodged a mountain side in the Himalayas. He rose on one elbow, and the frown on his dark face was blacker than the lightless depths of his vast cavern. Again it came, the faint, tugging, loathsome command, bringing him up to a sitting position. How long had it been since that call

had brought him from these passages? Not since the Egyptian seer, Farak, had divined the secrets of Bal.

And now again! A slave to human whims. Yoh-Agparth cursed horribly, and the demons of hell, hearing him, tried piteously to cross themselves.

And what was it this time? Ah, the same foolish plea. The future! Always they wanted to know what was coming. Why couldn't they wait? Did they expect tomorrow to be kinder? The fools!

Yoh-Agparth stretched his arms and leaped skyward, and his harsh laughter trailed behind him like a plume....

ON THE same night that these two things occurred, Reggie Saint Gregory strolled from his club and stood for a quiet, rewarding moment contemplating the glacial serenity of Lake Michigan. Reggie rather liked nature. Trees and bushes and water. Things like that. A chap knew where he stood with them. They were solid and comfortable. No shifting around, no back talk. You could look at a tree all day without getting into trouble. No confusion about trees. A chap stood here, the tree stood there, and that was that. But people—altogether different matter.

"Nice night, isn't it, sir?" the doorman said.

"Ah...yes," Reggie said. He rather liked conversation, too. Until it got out of hand. At the moment, though, it was going fine. A fine, spirited give-and-take.

"But a bit cold, after all," the doorman said.

"Well..." The talk was going off on a tangent now, Reggie realized moodily.

The doorman stifled a yawn. His feet hurt and he wished Reggie would go home. "Considering last year, though, it's not bad," he said.

Reggie thought hard, trying to remember last year's weather. It must have been important, or this chap wouldn't have brought it up. Something fishy about last year's weather, maybe. What could it be? "Ah... yes," he said, straddling the issue slyly.

The doorman eyed Reggie's lean, pleasantly vacant face with misgivings. Sometimes talk with this young man had a way of trailing on indefinitely.

"Anyway, the farmers are probably happy," he said, seeking another avenue of interest.

Reggie frowned slightly. What the devil did the farmers have to do with it? This doorman, he thought, while obviously a good solid chap, behaved as if his mind were on a pogo stick. Really, it was wearing. He sighed. "I don't know any farmers," he said. "I couldn't say."

"Well, naturally," the doorman said, with a little laugh.

Reggie pondered this. Why was it "natural" that he knew no farmers? Come to think of it, why didn't he? With a little start of alarm, he realized that the conversation had taken a mad turn. He had to break it off before it got completely out of hand, "Well... good night," he said.

"Good night, sir," the doorman said, and went gratefully back to his cubicle beside the lobby.

ALONE, REGGIE strolled down the quiet, wind-swept grandeur of Lake Michigan, mulling over the evening. It had been pleasant, in a dullish sort of way. Dinner at the club, and then a quiet snooze in the library. After that a bit of poker. Actually, Reggie didn't play poker; he wasn't allowed to. But he watched with great enthusiasm. He never understood why the members were so damned secretive about their cards. Acted as if money were involved instead of a lot of silly chips.

Reggie walked past the Water Tower, past the Tribune Tower, and then turned East on Ohio street. He had a small bachelor apartment in this neo-bohemian but still elegant area of Chicago. The streets were empty now, and the wind coming off the lake was definitely cold.

He hurried along, eager to get out of this weather and into his apartment. The streets were empty, and bits of waste paper somersaulted along the curb. High above him a cold, pale, lonely star blinked in the black sky. Reggie turned up his coat collar and put his hands deep in his pockets. Hellish weather. He remembered something about the farmers, but he couldn't pin it down. They either were happy or unhappy about it, that was it.

He plowed along, head bent against the wind, until he came to the first intersection east of Michigan Boulevard, where there was a newsstand at which he bought his papers. There was a nickel in his overcoat pocket, cold to the touch even through his gloves, and he fished it out and raised his head to the wind. He was almost abreast of the newsstand, and *what* he saw then made him raise his eyebrows in astonishment.

The newsdealer whose name, Reggie knew, was Creepy, was sitting on a fruit crate and leaning back limply against the wooden side of the stand. His eyes were fixed straight ahead of him in a glazed state, and his teeth were rattling together like hot dice. On his lap was an open copy of a magazine.

Directly before him knelt a tall, splendidly proportioned man, with calm, noble features and eyes that gleamed with a crimson light. This magnificent creature wore a flowing white robe, and his curling black hair was held in place with a heavy, jewel-encrusted band of gold. In his power-

ful outstretched hands he held a golden tray; and on the tray rested a single newspaper.

"Well, well," Reggie said.

He put his hands on his hips and studied the weird tableau. This is deuced queer, he thought, regarding the seemingly paralyzed newsdealer and the kneeling figure of the strange man with a little frown. Deuced queer way to sell newspapers, he thought. He dropped his nickel on the golden tray and took the newspaper and put it in his pocket. Must be a new merchandising stunt. Damned lot of overhead, though. Two men at every stand, instead of just one, and neither of them paying much attention to business.

Mildly curious, Reggie picked up the magazine from the newsdealer's lap, and looked at it. *True Astrology*. An ink-ringed ad on the open page caught his eye, and he read it slowly, stumbling over several words that were unfamiliar to him. The gist of it, as nearly as he could make out, was that if you got into a jam someone would come and help you out. Like his Uncle Ephraim. His Uncle Ephraim was always bailing him out of trouble. But that was over now, Reggie thought with regret. Uncle Ephraim had died of a heart attack several months ago in a Paris bordello, and had left the bulk of his not inconsiderable fortune to a scientific foundation that was studying the breeding habits of plant lice. Well, Reggie thought, dropping the magazine back onto the newsdealer's lap, maybe he could use this help sometime. If he ever had an anchor around his neck and was about to practise high-diving... But at the moment he didn't need any help, thank you.

He strolled on to his apartment, leaving the kneeling man and the newsdealer staring at each other with unchanged expressions...

HIS MAN let him in and helped him out of his coat.

"There were three telephone calls for you, sir," Roberts said, as he took Reggie's hat. "From Miss Alicia."

"Well, well," Reggie said, strolling into the living room. "Miss Alicia, eh?" He frowned suddenly and looked to Roberts' long, solemn face for enlightenment. "Dash it, don't just throw names at me that way," he said petulantly. "*Who* is Miss Alicia?"

"Miss Alicia is your fiancée," Roberts said.

"Oh," Reggie said. "Well, that's better. Alicia, eh? What did she want?"

"It seems you had an appointment with her for dinner," Roberts said. "She seemed quite upset about it, if I may say so, sir."

"Well, of course you may say so, Roberts," Reggie said. "After all, Magna Carta, Bill Of Rights, and so forth. Speak up, man." He rubbed his high forehead with a thin hand. "Dinner date, eh? I seem to remember something about it. Well," he said in a brighter voice, "too late to do anything about it now, eh? I mean, it's latish for dinner, don't you think?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that's settled then. Anything else?"

"The manager of the building stopped by again, sir. In a word, he wants the rent. He was quite unpleasant about it, sir."

"Well, did you give it to him?"

"I?" Roberts looked pained. "No, sir. We have no money, sir."

"Oh, that's right, slipped my mind," Reggie said, chewing on his lower lip.

"He was most unpleasant about it, sir." Roberts disliked bothering his master with these details, but there was nothing else to do. "He said he would put us out in the street."

"What nonsense!" Reggie said. "It's cold outside, in case he doesn't know it. What makes him imagine we'd en-

joy living in the street?"

Roberts sighed. He was a tall, impeccably dressed man, with a high balding forehead, and the air of an unemployed Shakesperian actor. "He's a brute, sir. He is quite capable of doing it."

"Tonight?" Reggie asked worriedly.

"Well, I don't think so, sir."

"Then let's stop fretting about it,"

Reggie said contentedly. He had a concept of time that would have amazed scientists. Time wasn't a flowing river to Reggie, it just didn't exist. Tonight existed, of course, but tomorrow to Reggie was as misty and vague a place as Mars. "I'm going to look through the papers," he said. "Turn in, Roberts, and stop worrying."

"Very well, sir. Would you like something to eat or drink before I go to bed?"

REGGIE waved him away. "Not a thing." He deposited his lean, elegantly tailored frame in a comfortable chair, and opened his paper with a little smile of anticipation. This was a big moment for him. He turned to the comic page, ready for an hour or so of intense concentration. But tonight, for some reason, he couldn't get into the spirit of the thing. In some dim recess of his mind there was a faint stirring of anxiety. He thought about Alicia. Stunning girl, perfectly ripping and all that, but hipped on this marriage idea. All girls were like that, perhaps. A little nuts on that subject. He had met Alicia—when? Oh, sometime last summer, maybe. They'd got along fine. She was stunning, all right, perfectly ripping. They'd talked about families, and how cunning little babies were, and about houses in the country with roses growing all over the place. Nice elevating conversations. Then, the damndest thing happened. The tenses got mixed

up. Pretty soon they were talking about how nice the cunning little babies were *going to be*, and how nice the rose-covered cottage *would be*—and after a bit of that, her father was shaking his hand and they were all having a drink and making plans to be married. Damned confusing business.

Reggie sighed. Well, there was no help for it now. The fat was in the Rubicon for fair. He might as well enjoy the time that was left. So he turned his mind back to the comics section of the paper. The comics were his favorite diversion, his natural *milieu*. Day-to-day living presented him with a thousand baffling, illogical problems, but the comics were always a serene and pleasant area of escape.

But tonight, he hadn't been at them for more than a few minutes before he realized that something was drastically, absurdly wrong! They were all mixed up. The Flying Space Cadet, for instance. Last night the Cadet was just getting ready for a trip to the moon. But here, tonight, he was already on the moon, and about to be killed by a clique of three-headed villains. How the hell had that happened? Reggie asked himself indignantly. His gaze strayed to the top of the paper, and he noticed the date. Ordinarily Reggie paid no attention to such things, but he happened to know that today was the first of the month, because he had got his club bill today, and the tart note that accompanied it had fixed the event in his mind. But the date on the paper was the seventh! Something wrong here, Reggie thought shrewdly. He got up and began pacing. This was next week's paper he had been reading. Suddenly, a deep suspicion grew in his spongy brain. The episode at the newsstand came back to him, and he clapped his hands together angrily. Now he understood the meaning of that hocus-pocus. It

was all trick, a cheap stunt to foist off worthless papers on gullible suckers.

"Ha!" Reggie cried. The devious plot was crystal clear to him. "Ha!" he cried again. Hoodwinked, that's what he'd been. Of what use was next week's paper to anyone? Not a bit, certainly. Those foxy cheats—the newsdealer and the kneeling man—obviously got a lot of next week's papers from somewhere and were passing them off as the real thing. What nerve!

Reggie sat down again and looked through the paper, glancing sullenly at the stock market reports, race results, and sporting news. All next week's news. What earthly good was it? But then a cunning smile touched Reggie's lips. There might be some money in this thing, he thought, chuckling slyly. After all, he *knew* how certain affairs were going to turn out, and there should be a way to parlay that information into ready cash. For several minutes he stewed over ways and means. Finally, his smile widened; he had it.

At the club there was one Doaby Forsyth, a genial young man who shared Reggie's enthusiasm for the comics. Doaby's family lived in New York, but they paid Doaby a nice sum every month to live in Chicago. Now, Reggie could bet Doaby on what would happen in the various comic strips in the coming week—and the beauty of it was that Reggie couldn't lose. Excited, he got up and began pacing again. How much could he safely bet? How much would Doaby stand for? Ten dollars a day? No, that would be crowding it a little. No sense in being greedy. Make it a flat five dollars a day. At the end of the week he'd have all of twenty-five or thirty dollars.

Reggie had never made any money

at all in his life, and the prospect of picking up a cool thirty dollars was a heady thought. Flushed with his anticipated prosperity, he toddled happily off to bed...

ABOUT THE time that Reggie was sinking into the happy depths of his first dream, Creepy Brown was standing before the long mahogany desk of one Malachy Nolan, a Celtic gentleman who owned quite a few night clubs and slot machines. Nolan was a big, broad slab of a man, with coarse red features, thick black hair, and round, cunning eyes. He sat behind his desk in his large, comfortable office and watched Creepy with very little expression on his heavy face.

Creepy was talking long, earnestly, and excitedly. When he finished, he leaned closer to Nolan and, in a voice hoarse with passion, said, "Now, whaddya think of that?"

Nolan lit a cigar and drummed his fingers in time with the music that drifted up from his night club. "Well, let's see," he said at last. His voice sounded like gravel being poured down a concrete chute. "You say you read something in this astrology book, right?"

"Yeah, that's right," Creepy said breathlessly.

"And right away you thought how nice it would be if you knew who was going to win the Ace Nelson-Wild Billy Bell show, eh?"

"Yeah—"

"And so you wished for next week's newspaper, eh?" Nolan said, nodding. "And a big guy in a white robe brought it to you on a gold platter."

"I swear to hope to die if I ain't telling the truth," Creepy cried. "I was too lightning-struck to do a thing but stare at the guy, and that's when this young swell comes along and walks off with the paper. So I came

right to you. You see—"

"Creepy, go home," Nolan said in an unkind voice.

"But look—"

"Beat it, you're drunk," Nolan said.

"You know I never touch the stuff," Creepy said.

"Then you're on the junk. Get out, scram, beat it." Nolan shook his head.

"Of all the damn wild stories I ever heard—"

"I'm no dopey and I never tasted a drop of booze," Creepy said desperately.

"Beat it," Nolan said.

"Well, all right," Creepy muttered, and started for the door.

"Wait a minute," Nolan said, and Creepy scurried back to his desk like something on a string. It was true that Creepy didn't drink or use a junk. And Nolan, like most people mixed up in unsavory enterprises, had a broad streak of superstition down his back. He had seen too many weird things happen in his life to be completely certain that there weren't strange powers at work in the world. Why, just last week he'd heard of a copper who'd turned down a bribe.... Figure that one, hey?

"Creepy, who's the guy who got the paper?" he said.

"I don't know. He lives in the neighborhood of my stand. One thing I know, though; he's a member of the Drexel Club. He came by my stand one day with Judge Bench, and the Judge said, 'Well, I'll see you at the Drexel,' when they broke up."

"The Drexel Club. That's a fancy joint," Nolan said. He frowned at his desk top. Should he give Creepy the brush, or look into this thing? He decided to look into it. It was crazy enough to be on the level. Also, his night clubs were in hock to the town gamblers, and he could get out from under if he had advance information on the Nelson-Bell fight.

"What does he look like?" he said to Creepy.

"Well, he's a little funny-looking," Creepy said. "He's tall, and has light hair, and—well, he acts like a bug, if you get me. Talks to himself, grins as he walks down the street, that kind of stuff. But harmless, Mr. Nolan, harmless as a flea."

NOLAN RUBBED his face. "Talks to himself," he muttered. With the feeling that he was making a king-sized mistake, he picked up his phone and asked one of his men to come up to his office. Handsome in a rather jaded fashion, with graying temples, pouchy eyes, and very good clothes, the man arrived within a minute. His name was Benjamin Nelson.

"What is it, boss?"

"Ben, I got a job for you," Nolan said. "You know the Drexel Club?"

"Yeah, so to speak."

"Can you get in there?"

Ben rubbed his jaw. "Yeah, I guess so. I know a bartender there. What's the deal?"

"Tell him, Creepy," Nolan said.

When Creepy finished, Ben started to laugh. He laughed for a long time and then he noticed that he was laughing alone. Nolan was staring at him with a frown. "Got all the yaks out of your system now?" he said sarcastically.

"Well, sure," Ben said, looking serious. "You want me to contact this guy, get the dope on the fight from him, eh?"

"Well, find out if there's anything to it," Nolan said.

"Okay," Ben said. "But supposing I use a dame, too, just in case I can't make a dent in the guy. If he won't go for me, then I'll toss in the dame."

"That's okay," Nolan said. "And I got the dish for the job." He picked up the phone again....

"You wanted to see me, Mr. No-

lan?" Sari Ward said from the doorway a few minutes later.

"That's right. Come in, kid. You know Ben, of course, and this is Creepy Brown."

They nodded around at each other.

Sari Ward worked as a cigarette girl in Nolan's club. She distributed all brands of cigarettes, an occasional wisecrack, and nothing else at all. Customers frequently complained. She was a slender, sweetly-built girl of twenty-three, with long, perfect legs, a tiny waistline, short blonde hair, and blue eyes that kept an eye on the score.

"Let's all sit down," Nolan said. "Sari, I got a job for you, kind of a reward for good behavior, you might say. This is a real opportunity for you, baby, and—"

Sari looked cynical. "What do I have to do?"

"Nothing much at all, baby. There's a guy in town who's got some advance information on the Ace Nelson-Wild Billy Bell fight. We want you to get next to him, in a nice way, of course, and find out what he knows. See? It's simple."

"Yeah, very simple," Sari said, leaning back and crossing her legs. She was wearing tiny spangled tights and hip-length black silk stockings, and her simple leg-crossing gesture almost caused Creepy's eyes to cross.

"Look, Mr. Nolan, you can count me out. I sell cigarettes, and I like my job. I don't want to get mixed up with gamblers and fixed fights. That's a fine way to die young, I've been told."

"But, baby, this guy isn't in the rack—I mean, business," Nolan said. "He's just a nice simple chump who stumbled onto some information about the fight."

"You mean he's on the level?" Sari said.

"Well, pretty much, I guess," Nolan said. "No guy is completely on the level, you know."

"Yeah, I know," Sari said, with a touch of bitterness. "Well, give me the rest of it. If I don't go along, you'll bounce me out of here, I suppose."

"Now, baby," Nolan said.

"Well, wouldn't you?"

"Sure, but I wouldn't like it," Nolan said. "Now, here's the pitch: you'll work with Ben here. Tomorrow..."

THE NEXT morning Alicia Masterson awoke in a bitter mood. She threw back the covers and put on a white silk dressing gown and slipped her feet into a pair of mules, and as she did, she said, in a savage voice, "Damn you, damn you, damn you, Reggie—"

Alicia was a tall, dark-haired woman in her early thirties. Her figure was still excellent, but there were tiny lines at the corners of her eyes. Alicia was two people; when she was with someone she was trying to impress her face was soft and feminine, and her laugh was a tinkling bit of music. But alone, her face was hard, and her eyes were cold and calculating. Now she was not only alone, but in a foul humor, and she looked like some Empress who had just been kicked out of the royal palace to make room for a teen-aged dancing girl. After combing her hair and making up her face, she went into the sitting room that adjoined her father's bedroom.

Her father, Colonel Masterson, was already up, eating his breakfast. He was consuming bacon and eggs, and between mouthfuls telling the waiter of certain High Command's mistakes in the last war. The Colonel was a bluff, hearty man, with a complexion like raw meat, and thick, brush-cut gray hair. He wore tweeds, and smoked a pipe, and talked of little but horses and war.

"Morning, Daddy," Alicia said

cheerfully, and kissed him on the cheek.

"Ah, good morning, my dear," the colonel said. "Just in time for coffee. I'm meeting General Thayer of the Second Army this morning, so I'll have to be leaving shortly." He laughed—the man-to-man laugh of a man who wouldn't like to scare the ladies. "Nothing to it, my dear. The usual thing. They want me back. But I've told them that old war horses need a rest."

"I hope you don't have to go away, Daddy," Alicia said.

"Well, duty, you know," the colonel said.

When the waiter had gone, the colonel said, "Now there's a smart youngster. He was in the Air Force last time, and I was simply explaining to him—"

"Oh, shut up, for God's sake," Alicia snapped. "The whole hotel is laughing at you. They know our bill isn't paid, and they also know that the only army you ever served in was the Salvation."

The Colonel coughed into his napkin. "Don't shout so, my dear," he said. "What's got into you this morning?"

"Reggie stood me up again last night," she said, putting her cup down with a little crash. She stared at her father. "Do you know what that means?"

"Why, nothing at all, my dear. We can always—well, you know—breach of promise and all that."

"I want his name, I want to marry him, you old fool," Alicia cried. "I'm tired of being a half-trollop, half-lady. I want to relax. I want to be Mrs. Saint Gregory, and have tea in my own home, and go to horse shows, and flower shows, and live like a human being. I don't want to go into court fighting for money from a man who doesn't want me. I'm tired of that."

"Well, I'm sure he forgot about it," the colonel said. He frowned slightly. "Are you sure he's got money?"

"Of course he has. He's from one of the oldest families in the country."

"I would prefer a new family with oil wells to an old family with just traditions," the colonel said a bit anxiously. "But, I suppose you're right. At any rate, there's always breach of promise."

"That's the last resort," Alicia said sharply.

"Of course, of course, my dear. You know, I've been thinking, I'd like to get back to polo again. After the marriage, of course when—well, the financial horizon is clear once more. Polo, you know, is the sport of kings, my dear. Once—"

The phone shrilled. Alicia scooped it up, and said, "Yes?" Then her voice drifted softly into a tender reproach. "Reggie, you are a naughty little boy. I waited last night, just worrying myself sick. I thought something might have happened to you. Lunch? Why, that would be delightful."

She winked across at her father, and he blew a stream of contented smoke toward the ceiling....

THAT MORNING, about eleven o'clock, Reggie stood in the men's bar of the Drexel Club, smiling with fishy affection at Doaby Forsyth.

"I say, seen the papers yet?" he said, patting Doaby's shoulder.

Doaby Forsyth was a large, cheerful-looking young man, with blond hair and round blue eyes. He was thoroughly normal in most respects, except that he suffered from the conviction that if he went outside in the daylight he would be struck by an automobile. For that reason he stayed indoors until dusk, usually hiding out in barrooms. Now he glanced at his watch, a beautiful, paper-thin platinum

affair, given to him by his family to celebrate his twenty-first birthday, and said, "Well, no, old man. Papers aren't in yet, you know." Doaby knew the papers weren't in because he had glanced at the table on which they were customarily deposited and had seen that it was empty. The glance at his watch was a bluff; Doaby couldn't tell time.

Reggie chuckled. This really wasn't cricket. "I say, I'll bet you I know what's going to happen to the Space Cadet," he said.

Doaby glanced at him sharply. "Without seeing the papers?" he said.

"That's right."

Doaby stroked his chin. "Bet you can't," he gambled.

A man standing at the other end of the empty bar looked at them with interest. He was a well-dressed man, handsome in a jaded fashion, with graying hair and pouchy eyes.

"All right, he's getting ready to leave for the moon, right? I'll bet he takes off."

"How much?"

"Five—no, seven dollars," Reggie said.

"But you can't know unless you've seen the papers," Doaby said.

Reggie's smile was superior. "Seven dollars says I know," he said.

"All right, it's a bet."

TEN MINUTES later the papers were delivered. Doaby scampered for them, opened one to the comics page. "We'll see now," he said. "I'll..." His voice faltered. He stared at Reggie with solemn respect. "Damn it, he *did* take off for the moon."

The man with the pouchy eyes drifted over to them, smiling. "Say, that's a neat trick," he said. "How does it work?"

Reggie blushed with pleasure. "Oh, it's nothing, really."

"It's damn clever," Ben said.

"Damn clever."

Reggie scraped a toe on the floor. "Well, I guess you might call it that," he said.

Ben scratched his head, smiling admiringly at Reggie. "You must have second sight, or something. Maybe you been reading next week's paper," he said, and laughed loudly.

"Well, let's try it again tomorrow," Doaby said moodily, and paid Reggie seven dollars.

They all had a drink then, and another. Reggie found himself warming up to the well-dressed man with the pouchy eyes. The man was all right! Kept patting Reggie's shoulder and telling him how clever he was. Yes sir, a fine chap. After a bit the fellow, whose name was Ben, suggested they go to watch some prize fighters who were training for a big match. This struck Reggie as very exciting. Doaby, of course, wouldn't consider it.

"But why not?" Ben said.

"And get hit by a car?" Doaby said. He shook his head. "Not on your life. You go ahead, if you want, but I'll stay here where it's safe."

Ben ran a finger under his collar. He had the feeling that the room was a bit too hot. Reggie seemed unperturbed by Doaby's attitude, and that added to Ben's disquietude.

"Doaby won't go out in the daytime," Reggie explained. "Car might hit him."

"*Might*," Doaby said with a hollow laugh. "*Will*!"

"Can't blame the chap," Reggie said to Ben. "You wouldn't go dashing into the street if there was a car there waiting to pounce on you, hey?"

"No, of course not," Ben said weakly.

They took leave of Doaby. Outside, Ben excused himself to make a phone call. He got Malachy Nolan.

"Look, I think this thing is on the

level," he said, when Nolan answered. "This character, his name is Reggie Saint Gregory, is making and winning bets about what's happening in *tomorrow's* comic strip."

"Good, now get the dope on the fight," Nolan said.

"**WE'RE** HEADING over to Ace Nelson's gym right now," Ben said. "If Reggie knows anything, I'll try to jolt it out of him."

"What kind of a guy is he, by the way?" Nolan said.

"Oh, a simpleton, but all right. He's not afraid to go out in the street, anyway."

"Well, why should he be?" Nolan said.

"A car might get him. You know, sometimes I worry—" Ben stopped, suddenly cold. He wet his lips. "Boss, that Drexel Club is a hide-out for rich screwballs. They got me half-goofy, too. I'll call you when I get the info on the fight."

Ben hurried out of the booth, collected Reggie, and they cabbed over to Ace Nelson's training quarters.

This was a new world for Reggie. Grown-up men danced about skipping rope, and pint-sized managers with cigars in their mouths screamed at their hulking meal tickets. "Snap that left, *snap* it, you stupid jughead! Ya ain't wavin' at 'im, you're trying to *hit* 'im." The place, a huge sweat-and-liniment-reeking hall, was crowded with hangers-on, sightseers, panhandlers, young kids looking for fights and managers looking for likely prospects.

Ben steered Reggie to a front seat near the centrally located ring. After a bit a bell rang and Ace Nelson climbed through the ropes. There was a good amount of cheering: Ace was a barrel-chested, finely-muscled young man, with dark hair and small eyes. He shook his hands over his head and

danced around the ring. His sparring partner came in and they began to fight.

Ben nudged Reggie. "Well, what do you think of him?"

"Which one?" Reggie said.

"Nelson, of course."

"Hmmm," Reggie said.

"You think he's got a chance?" Ben whispered tensely. He watched Reggie's face for a tell-tale sign.

"A chance at what?"

"The big fight, the championship," Ben said nervously.

"Oh, sure," Reggie said, with a grand gesture. It gave him quite a pleasant thrill to be consulted this way.

"A *good* chance?" Ben said in an insinuating voice.

"Oh, I wouldn't go that far," Reggie said. He felt the conversation getting muddy. He peered up at the ring. "Is this the fellow he's fighting for the championship? I mean, the one he's fighting now?"

Ben smiled weakly. "You're a great kidder, aren't you? No, he's fighting Wild Billy Bell. Would you like to watch him, too?"

"Who?"

"Wild Billy Bell."

"Sure. Why not?"

THEY WENT to Wild Billy Bell's training quarters and watched that young man box three rounds with a lumbering heavyweight. Ben watched Reggie's expression, he pumped him with questions, he laid clever traps for him, he tried to trick him into an inadvertent disclosure.

He learned nothing.

Outside, in the middle of the afternoon, he wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. He was feeling badly used. A concentrated dose of Reggie frequently left people limp. He decided to call in reinforcements. Excusing himself again, he ducked into

a drugstore and made a phone call. When he came out he was beaming.

"Well, let's have a bite of lunch," he said to Reggie.

"Lunch," Reggie said, and frowned.

"Well, what's wrong with that?"

"I seem to remember something about a lunch date with someone," Reggie said. "Well, it couldn't have been important," he said, after a bit of knotty reflection. Smiling again, he turned into a restaurant with Ben. After lunch, Ben said he had to go to his office to sign some letters. Reggie was somewhat perplexed by this abrupt termination of what had been an extremely exciting acquaintance-ship.

"I say, you're dashing off, eh?"

"Yes, but we might get together tomorrow," Ben said.

"Well, fine, top-hole," Reggie said. "Watch some more boxers, eh?"

"Sure thing. You finish your coffee, don't bother leaving with me. I'll see you tomorrow." With a wave of his hand, Ben was off.

Reggie finished his coffee and to his surprise learned that his chum, Ben, had already taken care of the check. This was fortunate since Reggie had not a nickel in his pockets. For a few moments he sat lost in thought, chewing reflectively on a toothpick. The day stretched ahead of him, long and lonely, unbroken by any prospect of fun or excitement. He might go back to the club and talk to Doaby Forsyth, of course. This was hardly under the heading of fun, though, for all Doaby liked to talk about, outside of the comics, and the cars that were lurking about to smash into him, was a distant ancestor of his named Fortune Forsyth, who had gone to his grave insisting that he was the inventor of the Phoenician Alphabet. For some reason, obscure to Reggie, Doaby considered this tic of his ancestor's highly interesting, and talked

of it endlessly.

REGGIE decided on a walk and, as he left the restaurant, he was wondering just who it was he had been supposed to have luncheon with. Because of that, perhaps—since when Reggie wondered about something he gave it his heart and soul, not to mention his eyes and ears—he didn't see the girl who was turning into the restaurant as he left it. They collided sharply, and the girl bounced off Reggie's chest and let out a little yelp of pain.

"Oh, I say, I'm terribly sorry," Reggie said, removing his hat.

"You should watch where you're going," the girl said indignantly.

"Why?"

"Well, for Heaven's sake, so you won't be barging into people like a Sherman tank," the girl said.

"Oh, of course, of course," Reggie said, flustered. He hadn't meant to say, "Why?" But this girl's very definite loveliness had added to his normal state of confusion.

"I turned my ankle," she said, putting one hand against the wall of the building and taking the weight from her foot.

"Oh dear, that's shocking," Reggie said, and fanned her face with his hat. "Shall we get a doctor, or something?"

"No, I'm not likely to need an operation. And stop fanning me, please." She laughed, looking up into his harried face. "If you'll help me to some place where I can sit down, I'll be all right."

There was a bar a few doors down. "Take my arm," Reggie said, feeling unaccountably masterful. "We'll have a drink, and you can rest a moment. My name is Reggie Saint Gregory. I feel like an awful ass, really."

"Well, it's not that serious."

A moment later they were sitting in a booth, and a waitress took their

orders for drinks. Reggie beamed at the girl. The day was suddenly very bright. She was a ripping thing. Silky blonde hair, very fine features, piquant to the point of sauciness, and level, intelligent eyes that would be difficult to fool. If she weren't so pretty, she would almost seem cynical, Reggie thought. Disillusioned, or something equally mysterious. She wore a black suit, a tweed coat, and a tiny black hat.

"Now, let me see that ankle," he said.

"Really, it's much better."

"Nonsense. Can't neglect a thing like that," Reggie said. He blinked owlishly at her. "I once knew a chap in Burma who let a little thing like that go for a few days. Turned into leprosy. Frightful mess. Had to shoot him, I think. His father was Resident Governor. Terrible row all around. Changed the local laws. Sprain an ankle in Burma today, tonight for that matter, and they pop you into bed under quarantine. Censor your mail. Terrible to-do. Come now, let's have an examination, save you from a fate worse than death."

She was laughing. "Did anyone ever tell you you're crazy?"

"The word has a familiar ring," Reggie said.

SHE PUT her foot on the edge of his seat and Reggie was pleasurably massaging her ankle when the waitress appeared with their drinks. It was a very nice ankle, Reggie decided; his fingers fitted about it quite comfortably.

The waitress coughed.

"Ah, beverages!" Reggie said. "By the way, what's your name?"

"Sari," the girl said.

The waitress raised her eyebrows as she served the drinks. Moving away, she muttered, "Now, there's fast work for you. He don't even

know her name."

After the drink, the girl said, "Really, I've got to be going now."

"Oh, please don't," Reggie said. He was enjoying himself immensely. He liked this girl. "I'll tell you what—let's go to my apartment."

"You've got the wrong slant on me," Sari said. "Spraining a girl's ankle doesn't entitle you to any special privileges." She spoke very coldly and sharply, but actually she was a little sad. This droll and slightly touched young man had seemed very pleasant; but he was just like the rest, it seemed.

Reggie stared at her blankly. "Nothing to be mad about, old girl," he said. "The truth is, I've got something to show you."

"Etchings, perhaps?" Sari said; with a sweet smile.

"No, of course not," Reggie said. He leaned closer to her, grinning. "I've got an electric train. We could run it around on the floor. I'll let you be the switchman. We change off, of course," he added hastily.

Sari rubbed her forehead. "You know," she said after a minute, "I'll bet you *do* have an electric train."

"Of course I do. Come on."

There was a little confusion about the check. Sari paid it, finally....

"ROBERTS!" Reggie cried as they entered the apartment. "Company. Get out the train."

Roberts came in, impeccably groomed as always, and nodded gravely to Reggie and Sari. "Very good, sir," he said, and went to a closet in the hallway and began taking out several large cardboard boxes.

"Reggie, you *have* a train," Sari said.

"It was a Christmas present," Reggie said happily.

"Who gave it to you?"

"I gave it to myself," Reggie said.

"Now sit down. On the floor. No, over there. Where we put the tunnel." He pushed several chairs back to make more floor space, and removed his coat. "I say, this is going to be wizard," he said.

Looking slightly dazed, Sari sat down on the floor, crossing her legs, tailor fashion. "Now," she said thoughtfully, "I have seen everything. Reggie, do you like prize fighting?"

Reggie paused and stared at her. "This is an amazing coincidence," he said. "All day I've been towed around by a chap who's buggy about it. We watched a lot of blokes knocking each other around. Really grim, I thought."

"Who did you see?"

Reggie thought hard. "Well, we saw, let me see, a chap named Nelson, and—oh yes, a bloke by the name of Wild Billy Bell."

"They're fighting next week for the middleweight championship, aren't they?"

"Yes, I believe they are. Now, just give Roberts a hand with the track and we'll be all set."

"All right." A minute later, Sari glanced at Reggie's beaming, transfigured face, and said casually, "Reggie, who's going to win that fight?"

"Huh? How should I know, old girl? Now, get set! Here comes the Orient Express. Wheee!"

Sari sighed. She looked at the little train racing about the tracks, and again at Reggie's eager, happy face. Then she shook her head slowly, unbelievably....

ALICIA LIT a cigarette with trembling fingers and threw the match in the direction of an ashtray. She paced the floor rapidly, her high heels sounding with staccatto irritation.

"Now, my dear, you must remain calm," the colonel said soothingly. He was sitting in a deep chair, a whisky and soda in his hand, and an open

copy of *The Military Affairs Quarterly* on his lap.

"Oh, shut up!" Alicia cried. She swept a lock of black hair back from her forehead and threw herself into a chair. "He stood me up for lunch, can't you understand that, you rattled old idiot? He's through with me, fed up. The honeymoon is over before it started."

"Well, you might call him, I should think. Perhaps he forgot and—"

"Forgot, my foot. I've got some pride left."

There was a knock on the door. "See who that is," she said. "It's probably the hotel manager to suggest that Colonel Masterson and his daughter clear out of his place or pay their bills."

"I'll handle this, my dear," the colonel said, and marched to the door in step with an invisible drumroll.

The man in the corridor was handsome in a rather jaded fashion, with pouches under his eyes. He smiled familiarly at the colonel.

"Well, I'm glad to find you in," he said.

"And who are you, sir?"

"Just call me Ben," the man said, and strolled past the colonel into the sitting room. He bowed slightly to Alicia. "Miss Masterson, I guess. Nice to meet you, I'm sure."

"And what do you want?"

Ben skimmed his hat on the sofa and sat down, crossing his sharply creased trouser legs. "Well, I want to talk with you two a little bit," he said, smiling pleasantly. "Why don't you sit down, Colonel? Might as well be comfortable, I always say." He struck a match on his thumb nail and lit up a cigarette.

Colonel Masterson took a deep breath and swelled up to his full height. "Sir, I find your manner highly offensive."

"Well, that's too bad," Ben said.

"Hate to give offense, myself. Now listen a minute," he said, and his voice was sharper, although he was still smiling. "My boss is interested in a character named Reggie Saint Gregory. Ah, the name means something to you, eh? Well, in checking into this Reggie's background, so to speak, we find out that you, Miss Masterson, are engaged to him, for the purposes of marriage or blackmail, whichever looks to be most profitable."

"Sir!" thundered the colonel. "You are speaking to my daughter!"

"Well, naturally," Ben said. "I don't see anyone else in the room by the name of Miss Masterson. Now, let's cut but the phony stuff. We're all friends here. Colonel, unless we're way off the track, and it happens we know we ain't, you're wanted in France, by complaint of the French Line, for swindling a number of passengers on a trip last summer. Is that right?"

"**T**HEY WERE legitimate games of chance," the colonel said, and coughed loudly. His face was even redder than usual. "A gentlemen's game, that's what it was."

"Oh, shut up, Dad," Alicia said wearily. "What's on your mind, Ben? What do you want from us? But first, how about a drink?"

"Well, this's better," Ben said, grinning. "Well, the thing is this: Reggie knows something about the middle-weight fight between Ace Nelson and Wild Billy Bell that's coming off next week."

"That jerk doesn't know the time," Alicia muttered.

"Well, we have reason to think he does. And we're trying to get that information out of him."

"Where do we come in?"

"You don't, that's just it. You stay out, understand?"

"No, I don't," Alicia drew herself

up angrily.

"All right. I'll draw pictures. We lined Reggie up with a dame this afternoon, a dame who's good at getting information out of people—if they've got eyes and are under eighty, that is. They're in Reggie's apartment right now. What they're doing I'll leave to your imagination. And the thing is, we don't want the little love birds disturbed. Get it?"

"You're muscling me out!" Alicia cried.

Ben held up both hands. "Now, take it easy, princess. You can have him after the fight. But right now we don't want any scenes that will take Reggie's mind off—well, let's say our business."

"But I love him," Alicia sobbed.

"Well, we thought of that, too, and we felt like a bunch of heels," Ben said. "Here we are lousing up one of the nicest love affairs since Dillinger met the Lady in Red. We asked ourselves: can we do this to that sweet little girl?" Ben shook his head again. "And the answer was yes," he said sadly. "So that's the way it's got to be."

"All right, you creep," Alicia said. "What do we get out of it?"

"We'll give you the winner when we get it," Ben said. "Fair enough?"

"Where will we get any dough to back him?"

"Hock something," Ben said.

"Now just a minute," the colonel said. "Perhaps you might allow Alicia to see Reggie just once this week, and on that occasion she might borrow a little money from him against—ha, ha—the future pleasures of their union."

"That's out. He's flat," Ben said.

"Pardon me," the colonel said. "I didn't hear that last word. It sounded just like you said flat."

"Well, that's what I said. He's flat, stony. We checked on him today. He

owes everybody. His tailor, his club, his friends—he's going to be tossed out of his apartment any day, as a matter of fact."

"This is very distressing news," the colonel said, making a brave effort to keep his voice steady. "Alicia, did you hear what Ben said?"

Alicia had fainted.

FIVE DAYS later, the day of the big fight, Sari walked into Nolan's office. She looked dejected. Nolan sat behind his desk, a cigar in his big red face, and a carnation in the button-hole of his blue suit. Ben lounged in a chair, his legs crossed.

"Hail to Mati Hari," he said sourly.

Sari sat down and shook her blonde head. "I struck out, Boss. He still isn't giving out."

Nolan took the cigar out of his mouth. "For God's sake, whatcha been doing all week?"

Sari smiled softly, more to herself than to Nolan or Ben. What had she been doing? This last week had been a little like taking a flying trip into the land of Oz. They had gone to circuses, to a marble tournament, and out to the shabby home of a man who collected old dog collars. Reggie had a surprising number of friends. Pan handlers, waiters, cab drivers, acrobats—the unlikeliest people. The only thing they had in common was a rather unexplainable affection for Reggie.

"He's really a sweet guy," she said.

"Oh, this is great," Nolan said, standing and striking his forehead with the heel of his hand. He nodded to Ben. "Great, isn't it? She's discovered that he's a sweet guy. And in just a week. Maybe in a year or so she'll have some more interesting dope. Sari, the guy has got to give!" He emphasized with a slam of his hand on the desk top.

"Well, he says he doesn't know," she said. "Maybe he doesn't."

"There's always that cheerful thought," Ben said.

"No, don't say that, don't say that," Nolan's voice was shaky. "He's got to know. He knew about the comics, didn't he?"

"Yeah, that's right," Ben said.

"Are you seeing him this afternoon?" Nolan said to Sari.

"Yes," she said listlessly.

"Okay, take Ben with you. Get him drunk, put a pistol to his head, *but get that information.*"

SARI AND BEN met Reggie in the lounge of the Drexel Club.

"What ho!" Reggie cried, seeing Ben. "The old prize-fight man. Sari, I want you to meet—"

"I know him; he came with me," Sari said.

"Great, grand," Reggie applauded. It didn't occur to him to ask how they happened to know each other. He had reached that state where everything that Sari said or did had the unqualified authority and sanctity of a Papal Bull.

They had a drink, and then another, very rapidly. Ben kept smiling and talking and ordering drinks. Reggie, after fifteen minutes, was pleasantly chilled. They began talking about the fight.

Ben asked him how it was going to come out.

"Don't know, old man," Reggie said regretfully.

A few minutes later Sari asked him.

"Don't know, old girl," Reggie said unhappily.

The poor things wanted to know so badly, he thought. And here he was, bosom friend, staunch and true, letting them down. It was unpardonable. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," he kept repeating.

"Well, then, have another drink,"

Ben offered.

A few minutes later Reggie excused himself, smiling broadly. He tottered back to the men's bar and found Doaby Forsyth happily regarding a pitcher of Martinis. "Doaby, old man, I come to you in great need," Reggie said.

"Anything, anything at all," Doaby said.

Reggie put a finger to his lips, tiptoed over and picked up an evening paper. He spread it out on the bar and turned to the sports section. There were pictures of Wild Billy Bell and Ace Nelson in fighting poses, a rundown of their past histories, their measurements, and quotes from both of them about the outcome of the fight.

"Now, Doaby old friend," Reggie said, "I must know how this fight will come out. My girl wants to know."

"Well, let's have a drink."

They had a drink. Then another.

"Now, let's see," Doaby said, staring at Ace Nelson's photograph. "Could be, you know," he said.

"Perhaps a drink might sharpen the old wit, eh?" Reggie said.

"Oh, first rate idea."

"Now," Reggie said.

"Girl wants to know, eh?"

"Righto."

"Good. Let's see, now."

"Drink?"

"HmMMM," Doaby said. He closed his eyes, put a finger down. "There it is," he said. His finger rested on the earnest face of Ace Nelson.

"Sure?" Reggie said.

"Without a doubt."

"Thanks a million, old fellow," Reggie cried.

Doaby waved a hand. "Not at all. Glad to help out. Fellow's girl want to know about a fight, fellow's pals leap into the breach. Right?"

"Right."

Reggie hurried back to the lounge,

rejoined Sari and Ben. "About the fight," he said.

They both leaned forward.

"Yes?" Ben said.

"It's Nelson," Reggie announced triumphantly.

"Damn it, are you sure?" Ben snapped.

"In the bag."

"That's all I want to know," Ben said, and left them hastily.

"You happy?" Reggie said to Sari.

"I guess so," she said. "You look a little tight."

"Ah, clever girl. I am."

"Well, let me take you home then."

"Righto," Reggie said, standing unsteadily. He looked at Sari, pursing his lips. "You aren't happy," he said.

"Oh, sure I'm happy," Sari said. "Only I feel like hell, Reggie. Let's go."

ROBERTS, it seemed, was out, so Reggie brought in some ice and made Sari a nice cooling drink. He sat beside her on the couch and picked up one of her small hands. She looked away from him and he saw a tiny glistening in her eye. Reggie frowned; tears confused him. He never understood people who cried. There was so much fun in the world, so much pleasure—why should anyone cry?

"Mustn't cry," he said, shaking a finger at Sari reprovingly.

"All right, Reggie," she said, with a little sniff.

"Much better."

"Reggie, what would you think of a girl who—well, who got to know a man, and got him to like her, just to get a certain bit of information from him?"

Reggie stared at her blankly. "What girl?" he said.

"Well, any girl."

"HmMMM," Reggie said. He pursed his lips, and gave the question a good mulling over. "I don't know," he said

at last.

"Would you despise her?"

"Who?"

"This girl—the one who met you just to get some information from you."

"Oh, that one." Reggie peered at Sari, wondering if she were drunk. She was certainly babbling on like a little brook of bonded Bourbon. "Well, it would depend," he said, being cleverly noncommittal.

"Would you think she was a designing little bitch?"

"This same girl?"

"Yes, yes, of course."

Reggie sighed. "I'm frightfully sorry, darling, but I don't know what you're talking about. This girl you keep referring to—well, who in the devil is she?"

"Me," Sari said glumly.

"You? Well, of course I don't despise you. I like you, Sari. We're friends. Aren't we?" Hopefully.

"After what I've done, you don't mind?"

"Of course not. And *what* have you done?"

Sari turned to him, put a hand on his arm. "Listen, you sweet, lovable cluck, and listen good. I work for a guy named Malachy Nolan. He arranged for me to meet you—Ben works for him too—because he learned that you had some advance dope on the Nelson-Bell fight. He wanted that dope. Now he's got it. And that ends my little act. I've done my job, and if you think I'm a creep, well, so do I. Goodbye, Reggie."

"It's all very confusing," Reggie said. "But don't go. We must have dinner." He frowned suddenly. "Who said I had this advance dope on the fight?"

"Search me," Sari said miserably. "It doesn't really matter. We wormed it out of you, and I feel like a first-class heel. Believe it or not, this isn't

to my taste."

REGGIE SLAPPED his thigh. "Well, you're worrying your silly little head for nothing. You didn't get any dope from me. You got it from Doaby Forsyth, a friend of mine. See, everything's all right now." He squeezed her hand. "Now we can have dinner."

"Wait a minute. Who's Doaby Forsyth?"

"He's a friend, good friend of mine. Back at the club this afternoon, when both you and Ben were low, I sneaked into the bar and put the thing up to Doaby. 'Who's going to win the fight?' I asked him. And quick as a flash, he said—Reggie thought a moment, then shrugged. 'Well, he gave me a name, but I forget it now.'"

"Nelson," Sari said in a feeble voice.

"Right. Nelson it was."

Sari breathed deeply. Then she said, "How did this friend of yours, Doaby, know who would win the fight?"

"Well, you know, I didn't think of that," Reggie said, and chewed his lip a moment. Then he laughed. "Old Doaby's mighty sharp about some things, though. Maybe he knew."

"Reggie, you ass," Sari said in a horrified voice.

"Well, you were both so down in the mouth, I just wanted to..." He paused, staring at Sari's stricken face. "I messed things up, eh?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said, putting her fingers to her temples. "I can't seem to think. Nolan will bet his money on Nelson, and then, if he doesn't win—no, I don't want to think, Reggie. Give me my drink. There are times when it is definitely better not to think, and this is one of those times."

Reggie was reaching for her glass when the drapes between the living

room and dining room parted, and Alicia Masterson, looking extremely chic and poised, strolled into the room. She was wearing a gray suit with a mink stole, and she looked down at Reggie and Sari as if they were urchins who had just accosted her for a penny.

"Such a pleasure to see you again," she said, loftily. "Roberts let me in, but had to rush off on some errand or other, so I just waited." She glanced at Sari appraisingly. "I wanted to see who had moved in on you, Reggie. I can't say that I'm impressed with your . . . ah . . . taste."

SILENCE HUNG in the air, like something about to fall with a crash. Sari said in an icy voice, "Reggie, just who in hell is this sway-backed clothes horse?"

"That's the sort of language I expected from you, my dear," Alicia said, patting her beautifully waved hair.

"Reggie, who is she?"

Reggie had stood up. Now he scratched his head. "I'm sorry, but I haven't the faintest idea," he said, in honest bewilderment.

"Reggie!" Alicia shouted. "You know damn well who I am. You're lying if you say you don't."

"Oh, I have it," Reggie said. "You're my cousin Annabella, from Nova Scotia. Dear Annabella, this is my good friend, Sari—"

"Damn your Annabella," Alicia yelled. Her composure was completely shattered by Reggie's blank, unknowing stare. Let a man desert her, two-time her, pawn her jewelry. That she could take. But not this. "Reggie, I'm your fiancée," she said desperately.

Sari laughed lightly. "Well, now the mystery is solved. Reggie, this nice young lady is your fiancée. She just said so. Silly of you to forget it, now wasn't it?"

"You shut up," Alicia said. "Enjoy your little moment, my dear. It isn't going to last long. Not much longer than it will take me to get a certain Malachy Nolan on the phone. Good-bye." With an angry flash of her skirts, she marched across the room and out the door. It closed after her with an ominous bang.

Reggie tugged at his lip. "You know, it's coming back now," he said thoughtfully. "I *was* engaged to that girl. I can't think why, though." He shook his head dolefully. "Awfully shrill voice, didn't you think? Well," he went on brightly, with the air of a man who'd just cleared up one problem and is ready to tackle the next, "what about dinner?"

"That condemned man, et cetera," Sari said, staring at the tips of her shoes. She sighed. "The goose is cooked, broiled, roasted, and burned to a cinder," she said. "That wench will call Nolan—" She shook her head, got to her feet. "No, I can't think of it, Reggie. Did you mention dinner?"

"Well, I've been suggesting that for hours," Reggie said happily.

IT WAS AFTER dinner that Sari's forebodings were fulfilled. While she and Reggie waited at a curb, in the efficiently-policed Chicago Loop district, a long black car pulled up before them and stopped. The rear doors opened. Two large men closed in behind them, and Reggie and Sari were propelled into the waiting car. The motor roared and the car rushed away, gathering speed like the winds of an ill fate.

"I say," Reggie sputtered. "I didn't want a cab. We were planning to walk."

"This isn't a cab," a voice said in Reggie's ear.

Reggie turned and looked into the small, unpleasant eyes of a big man

with a raw, red face and heavy black hair.

"I'm Nolan," the man said.

"Well, it's nice meeting you," Reggie said. "May I present my very good friend, Sari—"

"We've met," Nolan said. "But I haven't had the fun of meeting you yet. You're the boy prophet, ain't you?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Things will clear up soon," Nolan said. "Meanwhile, just close your eyes and take a nap."

"Well, that's nice of you, but I'm not sleepy."

"What a shame," Nolan said. "Hear that, Pete." He glanced at one of the big men on the jump seats. "He ain't sleepy, he says."

"Damn, that's rough," Pete said.

"Don't!" Sari cried.

"Put him to sleep," Nolan said.

"Okay, boss." Pete took a sap from him pocket and swung it down on Reggie's head.

Reggie went to sleep.

HHE AWOKE to a display of pin-wheeling fireworks within his head, and the feeling that the top of his skull had been strafed by a B-29 armed with atomic machine guns. He opened his eyes slowly, hoping that it was all a dream and that Roberts' imperturbable face would be looking down at him. But it wasn't a dream. Nolan was looking down at him, his big beefy face flushed with anger.

Reggie was lying on rough planking, in what seemed to be a decrepit warehouse. Beneath him he could hear the faint, but somehow ominous, sound of water lapping about wooden pilings. When he attempted to sit up he realized that he was bound hand and foot.

"Now, funny man, you talk," Nolan said.

Ben stood beside him, and the two

huge men were at his back. Sari sat on a bale of waste staring helplessly at her tightly clenched hands. She had been crying, Reggie saw.

"Talk? About what?" Reggie said, in what he hoped was a reasonable tone of voice.

"About tonight's fight, let's say," Nolan said. "You told us Nelson was going to win. Acting on that, like an idiot I'll grant you, I bet everything I own, and some things I don't, on him to win. Now I understand," Nolan paused for breath, and his face got even redder, "now I understand you don't have any real information about it. You got Nelson from some drunken halfwit at that loony bin you hang out in. Now, let's have the truth. Who's going to win? Or don't you really know?"

"Honest, I don't know," Reggie said. He felt cheered. Now that was settled and he could clear out of there. "I'm glad to help out," he said. "Now if you don't mind, I'll just run along. After you untie me, of course."

"Boss, I think he's lying," Ben said suddenly. "He ain't as dumb as he looks. Remember those comics."

"Yeah, that's right," Nolan said. He turned to the big men at his back. "I'm going up to the office. See if you can't refresh his memory."

"With pleasure, boss," one of the men said, slowly removing his coat.

Sari leaped to her feet. "Don't you dare touch him," she shouted.

"Now relax," Nolan said. "This is going to work out for the best, baby."

"No, I won't let you hurt him," Sari said.

Nolan sighed. "Come on with me and Ben, baby. This isn't going to be anything for a lady to watch."

Sari turned helplessly to Reggie, but Nolan caught her arm and then jerked her around and lifted her into his arms. He carried her off into the darkness, kicking and screaming, with

Ben tagging along behind him.

"Now," one of the big men said to Reggie, "we can get down to business...."

THE NEXT ten minutes were extremely painful for Reggie. The two big men bounced him on the floor like a basketball, and shook him until his teeth rattled like castanets. The violent session disproved to Reggie the theory that one could get used to anything in time; in ten minutes he was no more used to it than he was at the start, and he was convinced that he wouldn't get used to it if it lasted ten years.

Finally he was dropped on the floor like an old dishrag, and one of the men said, panting, "Well, he's a secretive cuss, ain't he?"

"Maybe just stupid. All he says is he don't know nothing," the other man said.

"Let's check with the boss. He might have some ideas."

"Okay."

They found Nolan sitting behind a bare wooden desk frowning moodily at his big hands. Ben lounged against a wall. Sari was trussed up in a chair with a handkerchief wadded into her mouth. The only sound in the room, as Nolan looked hopefully at his two muscle men, was the muffled, indignant squawks that came from Sari.

"Well?" Nolan said.

"No dice. He don't know nothing."

Nolan drummed his fingers on the desk. "This is very serious," he said into the dusty silence of the office. "I have made contracts with certain gentlemen in town. When those contracts aren't honored—as they won't be—they will be very unhappy. They will feel slightly better perhaps after cutting my throat, shooting me through the heart, and feeding me to the fish. After that, they'll look for you boys. If you are dumb enough to still be in-

habiting the world, they'll find you and give you a dose of the same. Yes, it's very serious," he said, and shook his head.

"Boss, I got an idea," Ben said. "It's chancy, but so is being shot in the head and having your throat cut." He took a bottle from his pocket. It contained a few ounces of a colorless fluid. "I got this from a doctor. It affects a man's eyes. Well, as a last resort, why don't I try to slip a few drops of it into Bell's water bucket. If I get away with it, we'll be set. They'll slap water over his face between the rounds, and he'll get some of this stuff in his eyes. After a while he'll have trouble seeing so well. How about it?"

"Well, don't stand there talking," Nolan said. "Get moving!"

AN HOUR later Nolan snapped on the small portable radio beside his desk. He wiped sweat from his forehead as the announcer's voice blasted into the room: "From Madison Square Garden we bring you this year's classic—fifteen rounds of boxing between Ace Nelson and Wild Billy Bell for the championship of the world. A great amount is in the balance tonight, ladies and gentlemen, a great amount in money, fame, and—"

"Yeah, you can say that again," Nolan muttered, standing, and rubbing his forehead.

"I hope Nelson is knocked out in the first round, you cheap hoodlum," Sari said. They had taken the gag from her mouth to prevent her from choking to death. They were gentlemen of the old school, in some respects.

"Oh, shut up!" Nolan said. "As if I haven't enough on my mind without your yammering at me."

Sari twisted at the ropes that held her to the chair and shouted, "I'll fix you if it's the last thing I do, Nolan."

"You want I should quiet her down?" one of the big men said.

"Ah, let her yap off," Nolan said distractedly.

The announcer's voice cut across the room: "...Seconds are out of the ring now, and *there's the bell!* Bell moves out fast, catches Nelson in his corner. He scores with a hard left, and then a right. Nelson backs along the ropes. That first exchange left him with a cut lip. Bell looks very strong. He's closing again, hammering with straight rights and lefts..."

"Wonderfull!" Sari shouted. "Kill him, Bell."

"Shut up!" Nolan said.

"...It's all Bell this round. He's finding the range time and again. Nelson is in trouble now. He can't seem to get away from Bell's hard straight rights. He's taking a lot of punishment in this first round. Now—and there's the bell. The first round was Bell by a wide margin, ladies and gentlemen. He looks very strong, very sure of himself, as he goes back to his corner. He's grinning as his seconds work on him; wipe the perspiration from his forehead and face. Listen to that crowd yell..."

"I feel sick," Nolan said.

"What's a nice fast train to New York?" one of the big men said nervously.

"And here's round two! It's the same thing all over again. Bell is out like a tiger, crowding Nelson into a corner. But wait a minute. Nelson is finding the range now. Bell seems a little fuddled, dazed now. He's wiping his eyes with the back of his right gloves, and moving away. He shakes his head. Nelson is after him, hitting him with solid lefts and rights. Bell is missing. He seems to have slowed down. He's blinking his eyes, looking around as if he can't see. Nelson must have shook him up pretty badly with one of his punches, al-

though it didn't look too effective from where we're sitting. This is Nelson's round, without a doubt. He's coming in more confidently now, as Bell backs away, shaking his head." A little later: "And there's the bell ending round two. And just in time, I'll bet Bell is saying to himself."

NOLAN CLAPPED his hands together. "Ben did it!" he said in a hoarse, incredulous voice.

By the end of round five Nolan was grinning widely. His two henchmen were equally cheerful. They sat smoking cigars and chuckling as the announcer recounted the carnage that Nelson was wreaking on Bell. "What's keeping him up?" the announcer said more than once, in an awed tone.

"Ha, ha," Nolan laughed. "That's good. Fall over, Bell. Lie down and die. Go on, make me a millionaire, you big bum. Good old Ben!"

At the end of the tenth round Nelson was hitting Bell with everything but the ring posts.

"Well, it's in the bag now," Nolan said, still yawning. "Let's finish up our little business here. Go get the boy prophet."

"What are you going to do to Reggie?" Sari said.

"Well, that's kind of a problem," Nolan said, blowing smoke in the air. He sighed thoughtfully. "We got to get rid of him, of course. And you too, Sari."

"No, you wouldn't," she said, and then she looked away from him, a tight, nervous smile on her lips. "Yes, you would, of course. You'd boil your mother in oil for a dollar."

"Now, Sari," Nolan said.

"For half a dollar."

"You see, you heard that business about fixing Bell's eyes," Nolan said. "Talk could get started about that, and it would make my bookies unhappy. They might think I fixed the

fight just to clip them."

"But you don't have to kill Reggie."

"Well, it's safer this way. Sari, you know how this business is. I wish you'd stop acting and talking so dumb."

The two big men came in carrying Reggie's bound figure between them. He was conscious, and looked fairly cheerful.

"This is the end of the line, Sari," he said. "Don't worry anymore. We get off here. These men said so."

"Oh, Reggie," she said in a trembling voice.

"Let's go," Nolan said.

The two men carried Reggie out to the river's edge. Nolan followed them with Sari in his arms. One of the men attached a heavy iron weight to Reggie's feet. "Well, this is it, chum," the man said. "Give my regards to the mud carp."

"Now wait a minute, you can't throw me in the river," Reggie said.

"Why not?"

"Why, I'd drown," Reggie cried triumphantly.

"Yeah, that's the idea," the man said, and pushed him into the river.

"Reggie!" Sari sobbed. "Oh, you monsters!"

AT THAT instant something incredible happened. Something so incredible that Malachy Nolan, who had seen such miracles as honest cops and virtuous chorus girls, very nearly swallowed his cigar in astonishment.

A flaming streak, trailing plumes of fire like a comet, flashed from the heavens and plummeted into the river. There was a flat, echoing *smack!* as this phenomenon struck the water, and then it reappeared, climbing in an arc to come to rest on the dank wooden wharf of the river.

Nolan sank to his knees, dropping Sari like a bundle of old clothes. His

face grew pale, his eyes bugged out.

A man stood before him, a tall, heroically proportioned man with calm, noble features, and long black hair. He wore a flowing white robe and a band of gold gleamed across his head. In his arms he carried the limp, damp figure of Reggie Saint Gregory.

"What are your wishes, my master?" this incredible figure said in a deep, powerful voice.

Reggie coughed, spewing out dirty river water. "Well, what do you think? Get these silly ropes off me."

"It is done, master."

Reggie stood free and unencumbered. The ropes had dissolved with the words.

"And her, too," Reggie snapped.

Yoh-Agparth waved a hand, and the bonds fell from Sari's wrists and ankles. She sat up slowly, her eyes round as saucers.

"Reggie, who is he?"

"Well, I'll be blasted if I know," Reggie said. He studied the man for a moment, then light broke into the dark areas of his memory. "Oh, I say! It's the fellow who sold me the paper." Reggie wagged a finger at Yoh-Agparth. "I'll just take that nickel, old man."

"You desire a nickel?"

"I should say I do," Reggie said indignantly.

Something cold and shining appeared in his palm. It was a nickel. He bit it cautiously, then slipped it into his damp pocket. "Well, that's better." He scratched his head, suddenly recalling the words he had read in the issue of *True Astrology* that he picked from the newsdealer's lap that night. Of course! It was all very clear now. He had decided that if he ever had an anchor around his neck and were about to do a bit of high diving—well, there it was! Pip! Pip! Here came this chap to help him out.

"Is there anything else, master?" Yoh-Agparth said. "If my mission is completed, I shall return to my eternal solitude." There was more than a touch of hope in his voice.

NOLAN HAD got to his feet. Some of his poise had returned. One of his men said, "Who is this character, boss? He's upset our plans, in case you haven't noticed."

"Yeah, I noticed," Nolan said.

"Shall we take care of him?"

Reggie put a hand on Yoh-Agparth's massive shoulders. "There's just one little thing you might do, old chap."

"Command, master," Yoh-Agparth said disconsolately.

"These chaps here take care of them," Reggie said, folding his arms and smiling genially at Nolan and his two hulking henchmen.

"Take care of them? In what manner, master?"

"Well, let me see," Reggie mused. "Tell you what. They're crazy about fighting. It's on their mind all the time. Supposing you just fight with them a little bit."

"I cannot fight 'a little bit', master."

"Well, fight a lot, then," Reggie said.

"Very well, master."

One of Nolan's men suddenly lunged at Yoh-Agparth, whipping a sap from his pocket.

What happened then was difficult to follow and, if one were sensitive, extremely painful to watch. Yoh-Agparth gathered the lunging thug into his arms almost tenderly, then tipped him upside down and caught hold of his ankle with one hand. Swinging the man about his head in a spinning arc, Yoh-Agparth advanced on Nolan and the remaining hoodlum. Nolan dug into his pocket for a gun, but the human flail struck him at that moment and knocked him twenty feet

away, where he landed on his head and lay still. The second thug, showing better sense, attempted to run. Yoh-Agparth let him get a full fifty yards away, then hurled the thug after him like a javelin. His aim was perfect. The two men went skidding along the wharf in a tangle of arms and legs, and came to rest with sickening abruptness against an iron stanchion.

"And now, master, I bid thee farewell," Yoh-Agparth said.

"But just a minute!" Sari cried. "Reggie, the fight. Bell is being murdered. That means these bums will collect fortunes. Oh, Reggie, can't he do something about that?"

REGGIE TURNED to Yoh-Agparth. "I hate to impose, old man, but—"

"I am at your service," Yoh-Agparth said wearily.

"Well, I'd like a man named Bell to win a prize fight. Now, it's rather difficult to explain, but—"

"I understand," Yoh-Agparth said. "And is that all?"

"Well, yes."

Something flashed into the sky like an arcing flame. Reggie blinked. Yoh-Agparth was gone. "Skittish sort of chap," he muttered.

Sari had run back to the office and was listening to the radio. "It's the last round, Reggie. Bell is being killed. Listen!"

"...What's keeping him up we'll never know. Nelson is hitting him at will. The crowd is demanding that the referee stop the fight and—wait a minute—I think he will. Yes, he's over in Bell's corner, Bell's manager is picking up the towel. Bell has put up a game fight, he's taken a terrible beating, but it will be over in a minute. Nelson is still moving in, still throwing leather—and just a minute! Bell has straightened up and started

to fight. He shakes his head. He's like another man. Nelson is backing away. Bell hits him once, twice, and *Nelson is down!* This is amazing! Everyone is on his feet. They're screaming. I'm screaming! Nelson can't get up! The referee is counting him out. It's all over, it's all over. . . ." The announcer's voice broke and he began to babble.

"Well, shall we go?" Reggie said, snapping off the radio.

They took a cab to his apartment, where Reggie got into dry clothes. Roberts brought them sandwiches and a drink. They settled down comfortably on the couch. "You know, those friends of yours are definitely not out of the top drawer," Reggie said. "Definitely."

Sari hugged his arm. "When they find out who won the fight, they'll be hiding in some bottom drawer."

"Well, it doesn't matter," Reggie said. Already the affair was assuming an unreal, dream-like quality. The past was past, Reggie always felt, so why worry about it? Still, there was the future. "You know, old dear," he said, munching a sandwich, "if I asked you to marry me, and you said yes, then I'd be in a spot, because I have no money."

"Reggie, that doesn't matter," Sari said happily.

"Doesn't it?" Reggie said. "Most girls make a frightful row when you tell them about the lack of the old ready."

ROBERTS CLEARED his throat. "Pardon me, sir, but I must confess to a most reprehensible bit of conduct. Last week I found an odd newspaper by your chair and, on examining it, I realized that it purported to be a record of coming events."

"Yes, it was next week's newspaper," Reggie said. "I made a nice bit of cash with it. Picked up seven dol-

lars' betting with Doaby on the comics."

"I, too, made a nice bit of cash with it," Roberts said. "I once had some experience in the stock market and, seeing that the market reports in this particular paper were highly interesting so far as certain future fluctuations were concerned, I took the liberty of . . . ah . . . parlaying our meagre assets into a quite impressive sum. You will not have to worry about the rent any more, sir. Or anything else, for that matter."

"Well, that's fine," Reggie said. "Top hole, and all the rest of it." He wished Roberts would go away and stop bothering him with these details. Today there was money, yesterday there wasn't. It was all so boring. He wished Roberts would make up his mind once and for all.

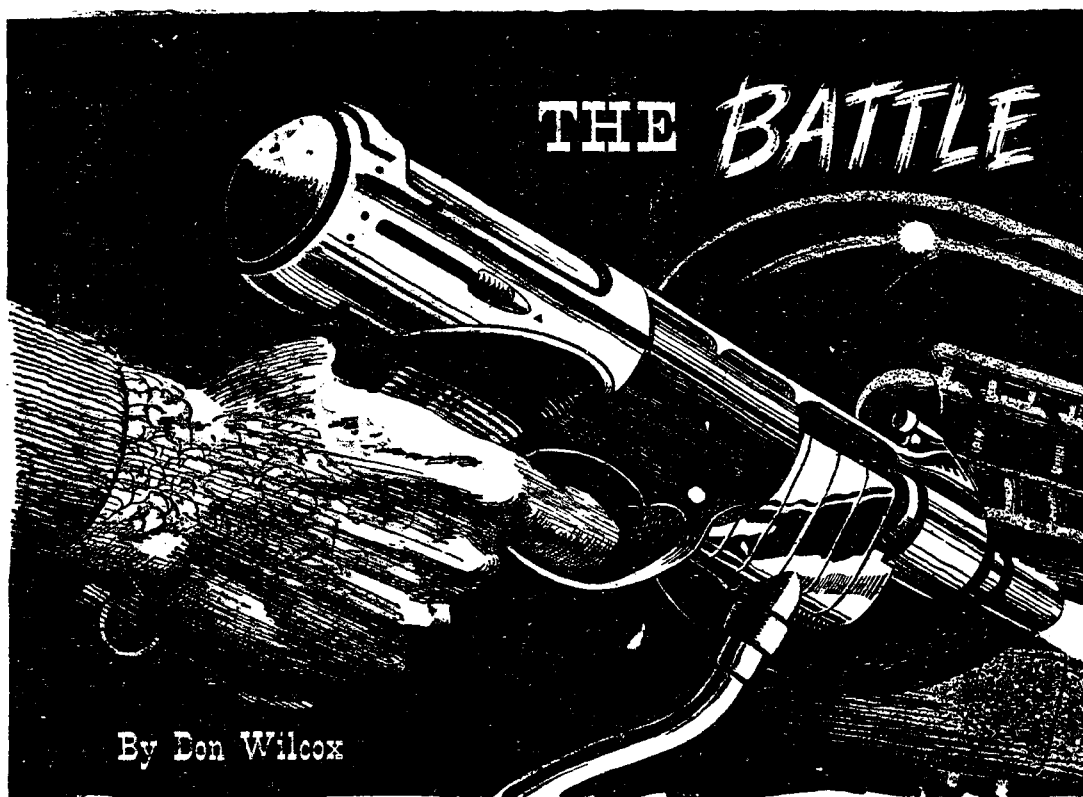
When Roberts finally left, Reggie kissed Sari thoroughly. Finally she stirred in his arms and sat up straight. She looked him in the eye.

"Reggie," she said, "I don't want to talk about that friend of yours. The one in the white toga. Not now. Not for a good many years. Some day, when we're old and settled, I'll make you a cup of tea and sit quietly while you tell me all about him. Do you understand?"

"Why, sure, old dear. He was a decent chap though, wasn't he? I'd rather like to get to know him." Reggie sighed. Good chaps flitted in and out of your life, and that was the end of it. It was very sad. "Yes, I'd like to know him better."

Somewhere in the depths of his vast black cavern Yoh-Agparth shuddered uneasily. "Never," he muttered, and the echoes of his rolling voice cracked the other side of the mountain in the Himalayas.

THE END



"You alone can save Earth, Sanders," they told him. "Without you, we're lost!" But it so happened his name wasn't Sanders . . .

YOU COME out of your daze slowly, trying to remember.

You know they've forced you into this machine, this tank that isn't a tank. You know the guns of war are roaring around you and you're supposed to do something about it. All you want to do is get to your typewriter, knock out your daily story, and go back to sleep.

A shell rips in front of you!

Your tank jumps like a pebble. Your head bumps the iron works above you, and your helmet crunches down over your face. The blast of fire outside your windows blinds you.

Voices are yelling at you through

the phones: "Full speed ahead! This is it! Move it, move it!"

As if you know how to operate this contraption! There's been a mistake. You've never been in one of these things before. All these gadgets are meaningless. You can stare at them, but you can't do anything about them.

But they're yelling at you to give her number ten, and in your bewilderment **you** reach out with a gloved fist and strike a button-shaped lever with the number ten on it. The button plunges in about four inches, and the lighted ten turns from green to red. And suddenly you're moving forward, right square into the big shell hole.

OF THE HOWLING HATCHET



Hank never had a chance. Even as he released the bomb, a charge from an enemy gun caught him in the chest.

"**G**REAT gory guns!" I yelled, trying to break out of this ghastly nightmare. Only it wasn't a nightmare. The big machine was clanking and roaring all around me as I sat in the driver's seat. My action had set the thing in motion, and I was in a state of utter confusion.

"That's right. That's perfect!" they yelled at me through the earphones. "Hit her hard, Steve. You can't miss."

And another voice, an older, heavier voice, called: "Good luck, Stevie boy. We'll see you in a few days—we hope!"

I shouted, "Hey, who do you think—ye gods! Where'm I going?"

"Right into the earth, Steve—right on your course, boy. Don't fail us. Everything depends—"

I didn't hear any more. The roar of the accelerating motors fairly deafened me. I was thundering over the embankment into the shell hole. The dust and smoke were blinding.

My monster tank roared down into the depths of the pit, and *plowed in!*

My windows showed me the inner edges of the massive circular stone-cutting equipment that surrounded the front end of the machine. The atomic-powered augurs howled as they moved into the bank of earth and rock. I was riding into a hurricane of dust and flying stones, right into the earth!

Blackness engulfed me. Then headlights came on, and I could see the dizzy spinning of the augurs up ahead. My big cigar-shaped tank was eating its way into the mountainside like a redhot spike burning into a wall of soft pine. Daylight was already left behind. I was cutting a tunnel into the blackness of solid earth.

So this was the "Howling Hatchet" I had heard about. A secret weapon for underground warfare. Atomic-powered and geared for disintegrating solid granite, it was supposed to be able to

walk through mountains, leaving back of it a sealed tunnel of smoothly coated walls.

But how did I happen to be here? I, Bill Barth, the fledgling war correspondent. All I wanted out of this war was a chance to write up stories of the daily fighting, so the folks back home could know what the boys were going through. There'd been some mistake chucking me in here, calling me "Stevie!"

AGAINST the howl of the machine I tried to reassemble my thoughts. The last I could remember, before they'd slammed this door on me, was an explosion, then a hospital bed. But that was a long time ago... and my memories seemed so dim....

Against the howling, screaming noises of the machine, I kept shouting into the transmitter. But those voices that had yelled orders at me were out of reach. I might as well try to outshout a volcano. I calmed down and glared at the intricate instrument board before me. Its glinting little polished buttons and colored lights mocked me as the machine drilled deeper into the rock.

"They said I was on *my course!*" I mocked myself. *My course!* As if I had anything to do with it!

Suppose I should experiment with the controls and fail! I'd find myself stuck deep inside the earth with no way out. The temptation was to stop everything before I'd gone any farther. I could walk back, couldn't I?

A backward glance showed me, beyond the long, dark, cylindrical, machinery-filled shaft, a spray of fire at the rear, blasting circular walls into rigid shape in my wake. Yes, if I could cut off the power, I might be able to get out and walk back through that freshly made tunnel—go back to them—tell them they'd made a mistake—I was the wrong man.

I snatched the little packet of papers that dangled from a knob. By the light of the flashing instrument board I could read the names on the credentials: Steven Thomas Sanders. Henry Longworth.

There were pictures of both men. The photo of Steven Sanders looked exactly like me!

So that was it. They'd ushered me out of the hospital into this. There must be an urgent errand ahead. It must all have been timed. Something was coming up that couldn't wait. What?

All at once I was watching the arrow on a certain dial. It shone with narrow parallel lines four inches long; red and green lines, three lines. The arrow was rising very gradually. The colors were jumping rapidly.

A SLIGHT shadow came over my hands. I couldn't look to see what caused it. I was fairly hypnotized by that one nervous arrow, creeping slowly toward a red illuminated zero. The great machine was grinding forward steadily, cutting its path out of that hard rock, so that a steady procession of raw cut circular walls glided back. Horror gripped me. I was riding into nowhere, yes, I must be riding toward something. The arrow was rising, pinpoint by pinpoint. An audible signal was sounding with a series of notes, each a little higher pitched than the last.

The shadow over my hand trembled. I reached to lever number ten and drew it back. Just a little. The scream of the grinding lowered to a sickening whistle. And I instantly regretted my action, with a vision of jamming to a stop amid a heap of broken rocks under the mountain. Rocks were bursting out into my headlights. I struck number ten again and plunged forward with renewed fury.

Then it happened. And I saw, in a

glimpse, what I was plowing into was not rock or dirt, but a great horizontal barrel of steel. It was moving square across my path—another "howling hatchet" like the one I was driving.

I crashed in through its sides. My motors whined and groaned, but I bored right in. The walls of steel tore open. The lighted interior was revealed for a split second before it all went dark.

In that flash I saw two men in helmets and tank suits, their arms flying up in terror.

I was bearing down on number ten, and my howling hatchet with its thousands of screaming teeth ate through the other machine—steel, fiber, flesh and bone. In the whirl of dust and fire I saw helmets, arms, straps of steel—everything flying, darting through the area of suction into the path of disintegration.

That was all. The mad tank carried me on into the blackness of the earth. The singing signal silenced, and the flickering arrow rode away from the red zero and blinked off.

"I've killed a fellow prowler," I muttered to myself. "Who or what, I'll never know."

AND THEN I was aware, suddenly, that the shadow across my hands was someone back of me, standing crouched, watching the instruments over my shoulder. I looked up and saw the face of a young man, framed in a tank helmet.

I had never seen him before, and I had never seen anyone so white, in such a cold sweat. He looked at me as if he wanted to speak and couldn't. He pushed his helmet back and pressed his hand against his face.

"Well, Stevie, you did it. You've got through the first barrier and we're still alive."

I stared at him. "Have you been there all this time?"

"I was back in the bunk when we started."

"And you knew I was sitting here, helpless—"

"Nothing helpless about you, Stevie." He tried to grin, but the scared look made his lips quiver. "I've been watching you ever since you saw him coming."

"I was too paralyzed to talk. I figured it was all up with us. I didn't know what in the world you could do. He was dead on our path. He figured on a suicide smash—a small price to pay to prevent him from getting there first. At first I thought you meant to outrun him—and that's what he thought, too. But then I saw it couldn't be done. And it was too late for a dodge. It sure looked like death for all of us. But you had a trick up your sleeve, Stevie. I might have known."

"A trick, you call it?" I thought I would faint.

"The way you suddenly throttled down. More perfect timing I never hope to see. But the real trick was the way you played the grain of the rock in your favor. He tried to retard, too, but the way the rock lay, he ate right on ahead like a drill through rotten wood. By the time he'd retarded, you'd smashed on, full speed, and caught him broadsides. So—well, he's now neatly molded into our walls, what's left of him."

"So—"

"So I congratulate you, Stevie."

My hand was so limp I couldn't lift it. But he gripped it for a handshake and ended by saying the sweetest words I ever heard: "Now that that's over, Stevie, I guess I can take over the controls for awhile."

FOR MANY minutes I watched over his shoulder. I followed the movements of his clever fingers and swiftly memorized his every move. Then I be-

gan to ask him questions.

"Can you stop the machine and start it again with no danger of stalling?"

"If I can't I ought to be shot, as many times as you've shown me."

He thought I was questioning him to test his knowledge. To him I was Stevie.

"I'm asking for information," I said bluntly.

He gave me a look that said, "Tell that to the Marines." He went on ploughing through the earth, and a long black tunnel formed back of us. The howl and whine of the drills, screwing into solid stone, filled the inside of the machine with a ceaseless uproar. Most of the time he kept going full blast.

"I don't figure we've got much time to waste," he said. "You certainly don't mean to put me through all those tests again, Stevie."

"Excuse my embarrassment," I said, "but I'm not Stevie. I've never been in one of these cussed things before, and I'm asking for information."

"My lord, Steve!" He gave me a look of disgust.

"But I'm telling you, Hank, it's all new to me."

"Steve, you've pulled some dillies in your day—"

"I'm not Steve!"

"You've pulled some sharp ones, but this takes the cake. Not Steve! I'd know you in hell. I'd know you by your voice. I'd know you by the way you move that right shoulder. Not Steve! Oh, yeah?"

"I tell you I'm not! Dammit, what do I have to prove to show I got in here purely by accident?"

"How did you know my name was Hank?"

"You've got it printed across the back of your jacket. Besides, I looked into that batch of identifications in

the envelope. Your photo is there with the name Henry Longworth."

"Did you overlook your own photo?"

"I found someone by the name of Steven Thomas Sanders. I will say, this: he looks like me. They must have got us mixed in the hospital."

Hank Longworth turned and glared at me, his eyes narrowed. "Did you ever hear of Banalog?"

"What's a Banalog?"

"It's not a whatsa, it's a who. It's the person that helped you invent this howling hatchet. Only Banalog, unfortunately, happened to belong to the enemy, and when this cussed war began, you and Banalog found yourselves on opposite sides. And now, Stevie, you've got the painful duty of fighting your fellow inventor. Does that ring a bell?"

"It might to Stevie, whoever he is. But it's all Greek to me. I'm Bill Barth, the war correspondent."

HANK LONGWORTH groaned and bore down on the number ten lever. We had removed our helmets and earphones during our talk. Now, the increased speed and higher screams of the rocks against our metal teeth caused us to put on our gear again. Our conversation through the intercom was brief and brittle. Hank was angry. He thought I was trying to play some hoax on him, and he couldn't understand it. We were pressed for time, our assignment ahead would mean life or death. How could we fritter away our energies playing games?

"How do you operate the guns on this thing?"

"I wouldn't know," he bit back sarcastically.

"If I'm going to be any help to you, you'd better teach me."

"You don't know what a gun is.

You never heard of a gun."

"What's this compartment marked eggs?"

"I suppose you never heard of an egg?"

"I never heard of one in a tank."

"Eggs are something you put in a nest. At the proper time they hatch."

"Is that why they call this the howling hatchet?"

"You ought to know. You named it. Banalog wanted to call it the boring bazooka, and I guess that's the only time you and Banalog ever quarreled, isn't it?"

"I never heard of Banalog."

"The military big-shots took up your quarrel, if you rememeber," Hank said, giving me the deep drill of his eye. "They finally agreed with you. It's not a bazooka. It doesn't blow through the earth. It has to hack its way with its battery of mechanical hatchets. As fast as the mass breaks up, it disintegrates, except—"

"Go on, I'm listening."

"You're testing me."

"I'm asking for information."

"The elements needed are automatically retained. The machine automatically takes in what it needs to form a concrete tunnel back of it. The water supply is continually replenished—"

"Out of dry rock?"

"Of course. You and Banalog, in making your tests, never found any rock so dry that it didn't yield quantities of water on an average run."

"What is an average run, an hour or a day?"

"On your tests you made twenty seven miles in nine hours, but you claim you're good for three days, non-stop."

THE INSTRUMENTS were acting up in a way that absorbed Hank's attention, and I was left to think

things over. I recalled something that had been shouted at me when it all started. One of the voices had yelled, "We'll see you again in a few days—we hope." The more I thought of it, the more I was certain this howling hatchet was off on a job too big for its britches.

Through the several hours that followed, I tried to observe everything Hank did. I began to know, from the whine of the machinery, that certain granite formations gave us a bad time. At other times we struck soft spots, and a few times, between mountains, we nosed up for a glimpse of daylight.

That was dangerous business. The enemy has sharp eyes. Once, right after we had caught a flash of sunlight, we felt the earth rock, and knew that a shell had exploded not far off. That, Hank muttered, was a bad break. We had been spotted, and the enemy nest was sure to be warned. They would know that their own underground tank, sent out to intercept us, had muffed its job.

We quickly bored in. Our emergence had occurred in the depths of a steep V-shaped valley. We plowed into the bank of the stream, and the river waters came hissing in after us, rushing against the blasts of fire that streamed back from our rear.

"The river will follow us right in," I said.

"For a hundred feet, yes." He turned our boring boat upward a moment later. "There—in case anyone tried to follow us, let them find their way through that water trap."

"If we ever get back, it won't be on foot."

Hank muttered something scornful. "You seem to have the optimistic notion we're going to get back."

That remark rattled around in my head like a spiralling bullet. I moved back into the narrow passageway and

found the compartment Hank had called the bunk. I examined, in this privacy, the dog tag I was wearing, and discovered that it bore the name of this fabulous character Steven Thomas Sanders. I couldn't help wondering what would happen to the real Steve if I never came back. Would he, an inventor, find himself rudely forced into my role of newspaper correspondent?

No—he'd never allow the exchange to go that far. Not if he was in his right mind.

Probably by now, I told myself, he was already raving at the doctors for causing such a mix-up.

"By now the jeeps are racing down our tunnel trying to overtake us," I muttered to myself, seeing it all in my mind. "I'll bet Steven Thomas Sanders is in the front jeep yelling at them to step on it. All he wants is to overtake his howling hatchet and get back in the driver's seat."

THEN I THOUGHT, "They'll come to the river. That devilish river will stop them, and an enemy shell will blast them to dust, and that will be the end of Stevie. And here I am, stuck with his job."

I tried to take a quick nap. I was still weak from the hospital experience, and all this terrorizing hatchet ride had tied my nerves in knots. I came out of a brief rest, however, with new strength.

We shared a meal while Hank stayed on at the controls. Again I watched him, trying to pick up everything. And it was well that I did, in the light of what followed.

I was beginning to like Hank. It troubled me to see that he was so deeply fatalistic. "It's like I told you two months ago—"

"I'm afraid I wouldn't remember."

"You'd remember if you remembered anything," he said. "I'm begin-

ing to think you're not Stevie—"

"I've been telling you. I'm Bill Barth."

In a moment he went on glumly, "It's like I told you two months ago. I've had a hunch from the start that I'll not come through alive."

We roared on, watching our maps and making routine checks from our dials.

"All I hope is that I live to see the enemy's nest mussed up. If we can once break into the central cavern and score one direct hit, three-fourths of their radio-controlled warfare will go berserk."

The charts and maps showed it all plainly enough, and I knew, from the dials, that the subterranean headquarters we meant to blow up were now less than an hour away.

"Another hour will do it," I said.

"If we don't smack into any mines."

"Won't our instruments warn us?"

"You should know." He traded places with me now, and said he guessed he was entitled to a few minutes' rest before the action started. "I don't exactly trust myself to dodge the web of tunnels when they come too thick."

I drew back on lever number ten, and cut the speed almost in half. Our big growling tank ploughed on into the wilderness of stone at a dogged pace. My eyes flicked back and forth from dials to maps and across to the little three-dimensional chart that warned of our approach to any underground openings.

STEERING BECAME more difficult. I could see from the map that the enemy "Underquarters"—the subterranean headquarters we sought—was like the hub of a wheel. It was charted as a big natural cavern, larger than a football gridiron, into which artificial tunnels had been built from

several directions. The enemy's top brass motored in and out of those Underquarters at high speed, according to the description that went with our orders. We weren't to spill any hints of our approach until we broke in on the real nest.

"How are we going to help it?" I asked. "Don't they have the same instruments we have?"

"That depends on how much Banalog knows."

"Banalog. That's the other inventor."

"You're the only one who knows how many of your inventive secrets you shared."

"I wouldn't remember," I said blankly. "Banalog. I never heard of him."

"Cut it out!"

"What's wrong? I just stated a fact."

Hank squared around as if to tell me off once and for all. "Stevie, there's a soft spot in you. You know it's a hundred to one that you'll have to kill your friend Banalog on this mission. You've guessed that he'll be there, in the middle of their nest of equipment, and it'll be your ugly job to blow him to hell. You can't face it, can you!"

"Hank," I said coldly, "you're a good joe and I like you. But you're so far off your base—"

"Look!" Hank interrupted. "We're about to bust into a path. Hold up!"

I struck out at the levers, and number ten bounced back toward me as we groaned to a stop.

"The eggs!" Hank said, whirling to the bomb compartment. "If we're going to give their seismographs the proper jitters, we'd better do it fast."

He fed fifteen of the metal baseballs into a chute. There was a patch of darkness ahead, off to the right, which might have been a crevice or a

break into a natural tunnel. The transparent chute projected forward at the touch of a lever, and turned off into the crevice like an elephant's trunk as Hank manipulated the direction levers. The "eggs" rolled down the plastic pathway and deposited themselves somewhere outside the path of our light.

But one of those loaded baseballs came rolling out into our immediate pathway, and we didn't care to take the chance of running over it. What it contained would make TNT seem like a small firecracker.

"That was my own fault, damn it," Hank said, perspiring as he worked at the levers. "I can't seem to pick it up, and there's no time to waste. Those eggs are ticking—so here goes!"

"Where are you going?"

"Out!"

HE OPENED a forward door that I hadn't remembered seeing. He crawled out through the geometric pattern of rock-cutting teeth, temporarily at rest. He walked into the glare of the headlights toward the uncut wall ahead of the foremost augurs. He held a pistol, ready for possible trouble from the dark opening off at the right. He bent to pick up the "egg".

His body suddenly twitched. He turned painfully, sinking to one knee. His pistol spat fire into the unlighted cave. The he dropped the gun and with both hands lifted the egg and threw it—pushed it, like a track man putting the shot. It rolled off into the blackness, and Hank crumpled to the floor.

I reached him as soon as I could climb out the door. I flashed a light into the narrow cave and saw a single fallen guard, no one else. I bent to lift Hank into my arms.

He groaned a little as I bore him

back into the interior of the hatchet. "Keep going! Don't bother with me, just keep going."

I ripped his jacket open and tore at his bloody shirt.

"No time," he cried. "They're set. Keep moving!"

He made a mad struggle, freeing himself momentarily from my grasp, so that he reached forward and struck lever number ten. The big machine growled and roared into action, and on we moved, past our planted explosives into the wall of stone.

"The controls!" he moaned. "You've got to put this job over, Bill Barth. Whoever you are, you've got to..."

And that was all I heard. The life had gone out of Hank Longworth.

LEVER NUMBER ten shifted between full speed and half speed during the next twenty or twenty-five minutes. I moved on a course of my own choosing not identical to the one mapped out on paper. Part of my weaving about was the result of my state of mind: Then there were other factors.

On a straight shot, where the three-dimensional chart assured me I wasn't coming close to any underground trafficway, I set the controls and took time to move Hank back to the bunk. I still had a wisp of hope there might be life in him, but the hope was a vain one. I plastered a bandage across the bullet hole in his chest, closed his jacket and spread a towel over him. Looking at his white face for the last time, I couldn't help thinking of the last words he had spoken. Now the job was mine. He had called me by name, and charged me with my responsibility.

"So it's up to me," I whispered to myself, drawing the towel up over his face. The knowledge of this machine that dwelt in his brain had passed away into the nothingness of death. I

hurried back to the instruments.

"So it's up to me. It's up to Bill Barth!"

I had the strange feeling that I was another person, looking in at myself. Form these walls of rocks I was moving through. I was seeing myself as the inventor Steven Thomas Sanders might have seen me. And I thought what he might have said to me.

"You've inherited our machine, Bill Barth. By a trick of fate it has fallen into your hands. The victory is tied up in this machine, Bill Barth. Keep it going, keep your head, and destroy the enemy Underquarters. Do that, and the howling hatchet will be worth the investment. Fail, and our lives—Hank Longworth's and mine—have come to nothing."

"Can I do it?" I kept asking myself. "Can I do it?"

"Find the nest, plough into it, and get one direct hit," the voice of my unseen observer seemed to be saying through the roar of the machine. "Find the nest.... Find the nest.... Kill the enemy...."

It was only the roaring, howling screeching noises of steel against stone. Walls of stone grinding away under the impact of the hatchet. Noises screaming through my brain, prodding me, knifing me, electrifying me with the one challenge to keep going—to do the thing that must be done.

I moved on a course of my own choosing, not identical to the one that had been mapped out. I was now going over the top of the enemy nest, according to the little three-dimensional chart, the dials, the auditory signals...

Every source of information convinced me that this was the nearest I had come to the Underquarters. And the nearest that I would come *until I came up from underneath!*

That was my own chosen strategy.

This was my job now, and I would

take my own chances doing it my own way. Only sometimes, through the screeching howling noises of the rock drills, I tried to hear that imaginary voice again, the voice of Stevie, calling to me through the roar of rock and wind and steel, telling me to keep going.

And telling me *how to go*.

Was it I who had thought of looping over the nest and then drilling back from the underside? Or had that mysterious invisible companion been whispering to me again?

Or was it the spirit of Hank Longworth, saying, "Go to it, Bill Barth. It's up to you!"

I was moving over the nest, to the west of it. The ceiling of the cavern I hoped to blow up was less than a hundred feet below the path I was cutting.

Now, I knew, the "eggs" we had planted somewhere back yonder would soon start exploding. I dodged all areas that showed signs of containing paths into the central nest, and planted number ten down solid, cutting as fast as I could go.

THEN, GETTING well to the west of the nest, I did something I hadn't tried before. I made a straight cut. I stopped. I backed away, leaving a spur of perhaps thirty feet.

Into that spur I poured the remainder of my supply of eggs, with the time triggers set.

I pressed the forward lever, veered to the right again, and started on a downward path. Now there were two well-planted pockets full of timed eggs, set to go off in series. I held the machine down to a slow pace and watched everything.

Was I close enough to the nest for the enemy's seismographs to have picked me up?

If not, I soon would be. I was now

embarked on the last sweep toward the nest, a long, low curve like the bend of a giant fishhook. My progress toward the point of the hook would bring me closer and closer to the nest. I knew that the danger of rolling into land mines increased with every foot of progress, and I depended heavily upon my dials for warnings. But apart from the mines that might be already planted, I knew my fate would be determined by the artillery that waited down in the big cavern itself.

That artillery would be directed by seismographs. Perhaps by electrical detectors, too. The profusion of traffic, moving back and forth over the enemy's underground lanes, would be enough to confound electrical equipment. Since they knew of the existence of this howling hatchet, by all odds they would depend upon pronounced earth vibrations to inform them of my approach.

A little checkerboard of red light suddenly flashed brilliantly from the darkest corner of the instrument board, and kept flashing with a weird vibrating rhythm, gradually growing more faint, then fairly melting back to blackness.

"That was the first egg!" I said under my breath. "Now is the time."

I reached toward number ten. The scheme was obvious. Each time one of the eggs exploded, way off there to the northeast, many feet above the level of the cavern, the enemy seismographs would register the direction of the disturbance. *Every disturbance would cover my forward motion.*

"Zeeeng!" Explosion number two. I struck the number ten lever and surged forward while the red checkerboard flickered, then retarded to a stop as it melted back to black.

"Set your drive on number eleven!" The words sang through my ears as

if Stevie himself had been right beside me. "That's it—the *synchronized drive!*"

WAS IT SOMETHING that Hank had said an hour before that was echoing back to me? I couldn't determine. There wasn't time to trace the inspiration, only time to act on it. I struck number eleven, and the lighted button revealed the words "*Synchronized Drive*".

"Zeeeng!"

With the sound of the signal the big machine leaped forward with a scream of rock-cutting action. Then, automatically, it retarded with the fading of the vibration.

"Zeeeng!" The action was perfect. I could imagine the enemy's technicians down in their big cavern—up in their big cavern, rather, for I was now below the level of its floor. With each explosion from some point to the northeast and up from their instruments, they must have hurried to line up their guns on the most probable point of breakthrough.

I made fifteen lunges toward the area of the cavern, timed with fifteen explosions from another direction. Each jump, I knew, was more dangerous than the last, for the closer my approach, the more likely that their instruments would detect overtones—or undertones—of vibrations from my true direction.

The second pocketful of eggs had been set for quicker action. Almost immediately they began popping at short-spaced intervals.

"Zeeeng!... Zeeeng!... Zeeeng!... Zeeeng!"

I could only guess what a flurry this new outbreak must have caused. To the enemy it came from somewhere up west—and much closer than the northeast disturbances. Would the enemy's guns be pointed only in false

directions? Or were they simultaneously marking my true route with every forward surge?

In a moment I would know. There were at least ten more eggs to explode, and I was now only fifteen feet from a breakthrough up into the cavern floor.

"Zeeeng!... Zeeeng!... Zeeeng!"

I cut off my headlights.

"Zeeeng! Zeeeng!"

I broke through.

"**O**NE DIRECT hit!" It wasn't Hank saying it. Hank was dead. It wasn't I. It couldn't have been, for my lips were fairly frozen, my teeth were set, my jaws tense. I couldn't have said a word.

"One direct hit. *Set your fire to synchronize!*"

Who was saying it to me? The voice of Stevie was like my own voice. That was what Hank had said.

"Set your fire to synchronize. Lever number twenty! Hit it hard. Then get out! Your own life's not worth a speck of dust after your guns start blasting."

My eyes blinked hard against the dimness of the big cavernous room. They must have blacked out, hearing those explosions off to the northeast... off to the west.... *But they hadn't heard me! Not yet!*

Those explosions from the west side were still coming.

"*Lever number twenty! Hurry! Hit it!*"

My head was roaring with things I couldn't have known. My eyes were fighting against the darkness of the big room. There were dim violet lights along the ceiling. There was a whole wall with tiny dots of red and purple and green.

It wasn't a wall, it was a huge three-dimensional instrument in the center

of the room. Men were moving around it in a mad flurry—men I couldn't see—just black figures that would block out patches of tiny lights as they dashed across in front of the giant instrument.

It was a huge three-dimensional reproduction of the whole damned war! That's what I guessed it to be on the swift glimpse I caught in that half second of time before the artillery began popping.

The big brass were there, I could bet my dog tag on that. And dispatchers and confidential secretaries and skilled guardsmen. Generals. Scientists. The enemy's top radar technicians,

My hand froze as I reached toward lever number twenty. Around that big green lighted table, manipulating the gadgets of their big three-dimensional instruments were scores of the enemy's most important people, including—

Including no one I knew!

"Kill the enemy! Kill them all! Strike lever number twenty. Hurry! Hit it, then get out. QUICK! THEY'VE DISCOVERED YOU! THEY'VE TURNED THEIR GUNS ON YOU. THIS IS YOUR LAST MOMENT OF LIFE UNLESS YOU—"

My hand unfroze and I struck lever number twenty.

"Zeeeng!" The explosion of the egg somewhere off to the west was the trigger that operated the two levers, ten and twenty. The big rock-cutting tank made another forward lunge up over the floor of the big cavern, and at the same time a big recoilless gun somewhere within the machine's framework fired a shell. The "Zeeeng!" was swallowed up in a terrific thunder.

The echoes rattled from the walls.

My eyes, blinded from the fire, tried to take in the scene. Again the sounds

of battle came.

FIRE RIPPED across the cavern in a straight line of instant death. Fire sprayed up through the wires that overhung the cavern walls. Flashes of electricity jumped from instruments in every corner of the room. Showers of rocks came tumbling down. Flame. Men and uniforms and weapons were thrown about in mangled heaps in all directions.

The third blast went wild. The jump of the howling hatchet had sent the gunfire in an indiscriminate direction. A tank of gasoline must have been struck. The yellow flames boiled out and ran in streaks, illuminating the room. Smoke billowed out, and I could see the figures of uniformed men chasing across in front of it.

They were coming toward me.

"Why didn't you get out!" Those words were roaring through my head again. "You've missed your chance!"

"I couldn't leave!" Was it the thought of Hank's body, back there in the bunk, that had held me here? A senseless thought, perhaps, in the light of what was happening. But he was still a friend, still with me, still giving me moral support, somehow, even though he was dead.

"Hank has played his part. You've got to leave him. Get out if you can. No—it's too late now. They're coming in on you. You're too late, Bill Barth!"

"Get out of my head, you damned roar—how can I think what to do? This is all new to me. I'm only a war correspondent. I wasn't meant for this. I ought to be back at my typewriter. This was a mistake, putting me in here."

"All right, Bill Barth," the voice seemed to say.

"What do you mean, all right?"

"I'm through trying to tell you what to do. Anyway, it doesn't make too much difference now. You've crippled their nerve center. That's the important thing."

"Yes," I thought. "That's the important thing."

"You've done it, Bill Barth. Hank and I have seen our purpose accomplished through you. It's all right now. Only, don't you think you ought to try to save your own life?"

"Zeeeng-BRRRROOM!"

The fire was still synchronized. The eggs were still going off at regular intervals. And that meant that all this fury of conversation had taken place in my head in a matter of seconds.

They were coming toward me across the room. But the new blast of death caught the front of their line. The foremost man, running in a circular path, escaped the blast of fire. The next six or seven must have got their everlasting. Another dozen or more bolted off in another direction toward a gleaming piece of artillery.

AS I HAD guessed, the artillery that guarded the many entrances to this Underquarters was trained on directions determined by the hoax explosions. My appearance by way of the cavern floor had caught everyone off guard. It was a suicidal attack, that fact was bearing down upon me with every vibration of the howling hatchet's motors.

Now I wished the voice would come back and tell me what to do. I looked for something across the room that might serve as a shield—something they would not want to destroy—something I could take refuge behind to avoid being blown to hell by the big guns.

A heavy shell suddenly smashed across the upper side of the hatchet's cylindrical frame.

"Hold it!" Someone screamed. "Give me a chance! I'll get him."

It was the shout of the one man who had outraced my last shell. He was somewhere around the hatchet, trying to break in.

Another *Zeeeng!* And another blast of my own artillery, smashing across the fiery way to catch a row of jeeps racing down into the circus of destruction. Wheels flew in all directions, and a section of stone wall came ripping down with clouds of smoke and dust.

At the same time another blaze of fire struck out from one of their guns. The shell struck hard, and the big steel framework around me jumped and staggered. My head was struck as I fell back sidewise. I clutched at my helmet.

"Help me get out of this damned—help me! It's smashing my damned brain! Help—Ugh! Who are you?"

I was talking in a daze for a minute. I had the impression that the side door had flown open and an enemy soldier was standing there pointing a pistol at me.

"Who are you? Or are you just something I'm seeing?"

That last hard jolt had fairly knocked the seams out of this steel monster. And now it was all up, I saw. The flames threw light across the edge of the open door, and clinging to it was this soldier's hard hand, the knuckles white. His eyes glittered in the glare of the light. I thought he must be breathing smoke.

I couldn't move, I was too dazed. The pistol was aimed squarely at me. If I could have dodged back three inches I might have had a chance to shoot it out with him. But my head was just clear enough to know that if I moved a fraction of an inch he would shoot.

Yet he didn't shoot, and this made me think he wanted something from me. Did he think he could capture this

hulk of steel? It was little more than a wreck now.

I began to count. In another second, surely, there would be one more explosion up yonder, and this steel boat would give another jump. Or had the last one already happened?

One, two, three, four. No explosion. It was all over. My howling hatchet had made its last automatic jump. And all I would have to do to enter another world would be to try to reach for lever number ten.

"All right, you've got me. Do you want me dead or alive?"

I doubted whether he could understand my language, but it was worth a chance.

"If you think I can reveal the secrets of this machine, you're all wrong. Well, what are you waiting for?"

He didn't blink an eyelash.

On a bold impulse I reached for the handle that would swing the door closed. He didn't shoot. I touched the door handle, the door moved an inch, and he fell forward. As he fell I saw that the back of his head was shot off. That last shell from his own comrades had caught him, and he'd frozen in his tracks against the door.

I tried lever ten, then, and the jolted, shaken hulk of steel slowly moved into action. I set it to make a wide circular swing around the big room, and I got out and ran for the shadows.

MY ONE and only chance to make a getaway was to go back the way I had come.

It may sound slightly bloodthirsty for me to admit that during the next twenty minutes I killed more than twenty men. I look back upon that deal as the most exhausting and nerve-racking twenty minutes of my life. And I only wonder that I had the good fortune to come out alive.

As I see it now, my nerve to kill the enemy would have given out, and I

would have lost my last slender grip on life if one particular person had confronted me. For the tenuous hold on life which was mine in those twenty minutes was simply the will to keep on killing, nothing else but that.

The one direction I looked for, through all the smoke and flame and flurry, was *down*. I remember dashing across from one shadow to another, ducking back whenever a new light flared up, and at last spotting the pit in the floor where the tank had brought me up.

The fireworks were still going hot and heavy. The tank was limping around a wide circle, and every few yards, responding to the automatic mechanisms that I had left turned on, it fired another shell. Seven or eight more blasts must have burst from its inner guns before the flow of ammunition ran out, and by that time I had won my first and easiest battle. In a quick contest of fists, I knocked out someone who blundered into my path.

He fell with a grunt of surprise, and I pounced on him. He was in no shape to argue, and whatever it was he muttered, I paid no attention. All I wanted from him was part of his uniform, for whatever protection it might offer. A moment later I donned his coat and borrowed his pistol and went on my way.

THE NEXT step might have been right down in the pit, but my eye caught sight of something on the floor that I needed badly—a flashlight.

Luck was with me, no doubt about it. Someone's scream from across the room was my warning to duck another shell. The artillery was getting into gear in reality, at last, and the poor old howling hatchet, sturdy as it had been through miles of earth-cutting, was at last in for an awful beat-

ing. The enemy nest was already a complete shambles, and from then on it was up to everyone to look out for his own life. Those flying shells were no-respecters of anyone.

I rolled over the floor under a spreading cloud of smoke. I snatched the flashlight, and rolled again.

I climbed down into the pit with care. It presented an inclined surface, and I might have bounded down if it hadn't been pitch dark. Then a streak of fire came running across toward me and I saw the way clearly. Right up to the surface the big machine had laid its smoothly plastered walls, a neat cylinder, large enough to drive a small tank through.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" The wail rang through the room. If any of those chasing, frenzied soldiers still believed I was in the tank, the shout dispelled the illusion. Rifles began to crackle.

I was down in the depths, sprinting.

Until the shadowy cylindrical walls curved away from the light, I sprinted.

I paused long enough to glance back at the emptiness. I flashed on the light for an instant, caught a glimpse of the wide open path ahead, and ran as hard as I could go.

They would follow me, I hadn't the slightest doubt of that. I thought ahead to one point of safety. All I could hope for was to make my way up the long fishhook curve to the spur where the tank had cut a path and backed away.

Racing up the grade, I heard the sputter of jeeps. They were coming after me on the rear. My moments were numbered, unless—

The path curved, then curved back. I almost missed the spot I was looking for, it was so well concealed. A quick flash of light revealed it—the spur that led off the upward route. I darted into it. With a pistol in each hand I waited.

The first jeep that came swinging up through the curve had two occupants. I aimed carefully and with two shots I put an end to both of them. I held my breath for a tense moment waiting to see whether the jeep would come coasting back down the grade. Luck was with me. It rolled on ahead, over the hump. There would be no dead men coasting back down the path to warn of my hiding place.

Two more jeeps followed over the same course and I took care of both before the soldiers on foot followed up the path. The game was a tense one now. One slip could be fatal. The roar of my pistols must have echoed down through the tunnel. But there the roar from below was still booming through the hollow passages.

ABOUT A half hour later the pathway had grown quiet enough so that I ventured out, stepping carefully over the men I had had to shoot down. Ahead, blasts had broken the floor of the tunnel. The jeeps had fallen through.

Through the darkness I plodded for what seemed miles before I got away from the smoke-filled air. The fumes must have circulated like compressed gas. I was gagging for a breath of fresh air when at last I came to the place where Hank had been murdered.

I paused, standing in the darkness, listening, breathing. What a luxury to breathe clear air.

I wondered where the narrow natural cave might lead, but I knew I dare not take a chance. My one way back to home territory was by the route I had come. I trudged on.

At length I reached the descent that was filled with water from the river. I flashed my light around, hoping against hope that there might be some break in the ceiling that I could climb

through.

I rested for several minutes, then stripped down to my shorts. The one way back home was through the tunnel. The one way through the tunnel at this point was to swim about a hundred feet under water and find my way up into the river.

Maybe I tried it the hard way. I plunged in and pawed through the watery blackness until my lungs grew tight, and then turned back. I reached my starting point, and crawled back up onto the dry surface, panting hard. Something told me it was a longer underwater swim than I would ever make. I had estimated more than fifty feet of forward progress, and my open eyes had failed to see any hint of light ahead through the clear water.

It was more than an hour before I tried again. I tried to estimate how much time had passed during the battle at the Underquarters. Perhaps it was night outside. If I dared to sleep for a few hours, would my next trial find daylight?

The low muffled sound of a motor brought me up with a start. Were they coming? Placing my ear down on the surface of the tunnel I could hear the steady hum.

I rolled my clothing and possessions into a ball and hid them in the only possible place—under the edge of the water where the tunnel inclined downward. And again I dived in to try the swim for freedom.

I swam with the roar of motors in my ears, and when I had gone until my lungs were bursting—when I thought this was surely the last moment of life—my hands caught onto an object that was moving through the water under me.

IT TOOK me back to the side I had come from. I clung tight. I was dragged up onto the inclined tunnel

floor more dead than alive.

I heard the voices of men as they clambered out of a rubber-enclosed tank. They pumped water out of me and soon had me breathing in good style.

"Stevie!"

"What on earth were you doing in that water trap, Stevie?"

"Stevie, don't you remember me? I helped you and Banalog build that cave-cutting go-cart. Lemme shake your hand, boy. You've put the deal over."

They helped me dress and got me into the rubber-sealed underwater tank and we went through the water and up to the dry tunnel entrance on the other side of the river.

As we motored back through the smoothly banked tube, they talked in satisfied terms. The Underquarters of the enemy had been blasted to hell.

I said, "You've got the wrong man in me, fellows. I don't happen to be Stevie. The fellow Stevie you've got me mixed up with must be back in the hospital."

One of the soldiers looked at me and nodded. "I think so. Would you like to go back and see him?"

That's where they took me. From then on for a couple of days a doctor had me in charge. He had me go over my story several times. Each time he would mention one particular detail.

"You didn't come in contact with Banalog, did you?"

And I would always ask, "What's Banalog? I don't think I ever heard of it."

"I told you yesterday, it's a person. It was the partner of Steven Sanders—his fellow inventor. Banalog happened to be on the other side in this war,

and it would have been Stevie's painful job to kill him if they had met."

"I killed several men."

"But you didn't kill Banalog."

"I don't know Banalog. I never heard of Banalog. I wouldn't know whether I killed him or not."

That was the way our conversation ran until late the second day, when the doctor added, "I'm sure you didn't kill Banalog, because he's been taken prisoner. He's alive. He'll remain a prisoner until the end of the war. Which means he won't be harmed."

Something inside me let go, then, and I began to sob like a child.

"You're going to be all right now," the doctor said. "Our minds can play tricks on us sometimes."

I listened, and what he said seemed to dislodge a lot of darkness from somewhere in the front of my brain.

"You see, the cruelties of war sometimes give us jobs to do that are simply too painful to be faced. And when two men have been very close friends and have high admiration for each other, their minds might choose a devious path of escape from reality—even a mental blackout—rather than admit that they can kill each other. Do you understand what I am saying?"

"I—I think so."

"Good," the doctor said, gently. "You're going to be all right. And just who are you, if you don't mind telling me?"

I drew a quiet breath of deep relief, swabbed the tears of distress and shock from my eyes, and said what I knew to be true, "I'm Steven Thomas Sanders, the inventor—Banalogs best friend."

THE END

The guy who said, "Beware the Ides of March!" wasn't talking about March 21, 1952. Why? Because that's the date

FANTASTIC

goes on sale at your favorite newsstand!



ONE EYE BEATS TWO!

...BY TOM LYNCH...

IN AN AGE when high-speed cars, boats and planes are commonplace, the need for acute vision seems obvious. Without question you'd say that any two-eyed pilot, for example, would be more efficient than a one-eyed pilot. And you'd be wrong—possibly!

Jet and rocket studies have shown that the pilots of these terrifically fast ships must have good judgment and vision, which seems only natural. But it has been observed that very often one-eyed aviators, one-eyed drivers, and even people with faulty binocular vision, are able to handle these high-speed vehicles with the same facility as their physically perfect brothers. Handicapped persons are often better automobile drivers, too, because there is some acute sharpening of their judgment to compensate for lack of binocular vision. How to account for this amazing situation?

A former Luftwaffe doctor now working for our government has made an extensive investigation of the connection between eyesight and the control of aircraft, and has

come up with an interesting and important bit of data. It is *not* binocular vision that is important in judging the distances and speeds involved in motion. Rather it is some measuring device within the head capable of making comparisons between objects. The scientist has found that it is very important that a pilot, for example, have some motion-comparison standard, such as a row of trees paralleling a runway, with which to make his speed judgments. In tests involving this faculty, one-eyed pilots often did as well as, or better than, those with normal vision.

When you think of the enormous waste of men in those who were washed out of flight training because of so-called defective vision, you can see how important these new studies are to the future. Scientists have come to consider that the demands of the future can be well satisfied by using these hitherto repressed talents that exist even in severely handicapped (visually) persons. A one-eyed rocket pilot may make a better "hot-rodder" than one with two eyes!

Modern Witch Doctor

By Peter Dakin

THE SOWING of clouds with silver-iodide particles to induce rainfall is big business and the claims made for this technique range from modest to spectacular. Objective scientists, however, are viewing matters in a more skeptical light, especially since some further research has been done on the nature of rain-formation. Consequently, some scientists are claiming that rain-makers and witch-doctors have equally valid methods of causing rainfall, with the laurels going to the latter!

It's not quite so bad as that, but it has been discovered that exposure to sunlight nullifies the ability of silver-iodide particles to serve as nuclei for the condensation of rain drops. Less than twenty minutes' exposure to sunlight deactivates the chemical particles. And this agrees with observations which show that sowing clouds is not an absolute assurance of inducing rainfall. It seems to work only some of the time. Nevertheless, there is certainly a core of truth in rain-making experiments and they will be continued.

Artificial control of the weather is in its infant stages and, like so many new

ideas, can be easily oversold. Too little is known to make positive assertions that sowing clouds with "gumbo No. 3" will cause rainfall. On the other hand, the mechanism of natural rain, with its formation of droplets and then drops upon dust and mote nuclei, is certainly known. Also, experiments with sowing clouds with particles of solidified carbon dioxide have demonstrated their rain-making qualities. We seem to be on the verge of one of those discoveries that may strongly influence our whole relationship with nature.

Whether or not rainmaking is an exactly established science is really unimportant; it is a definite possibility, though, and it is a first feeble step into a future where we may artificially distribute and control the temperature, rainfall, wind-intensity, etc., of the whole Earth. Even atomic science may some day be pressed into aiding this work. The concept of melting portions of the Polar Cap with atomic energy has already been broached! Eventually some way may even be found to shift the ocean currents! The Earth is a natural air-conditioning machine!

MURDER ON MARS

When Big Business tangles with the angels of Mars, the least that can happen is homicide!



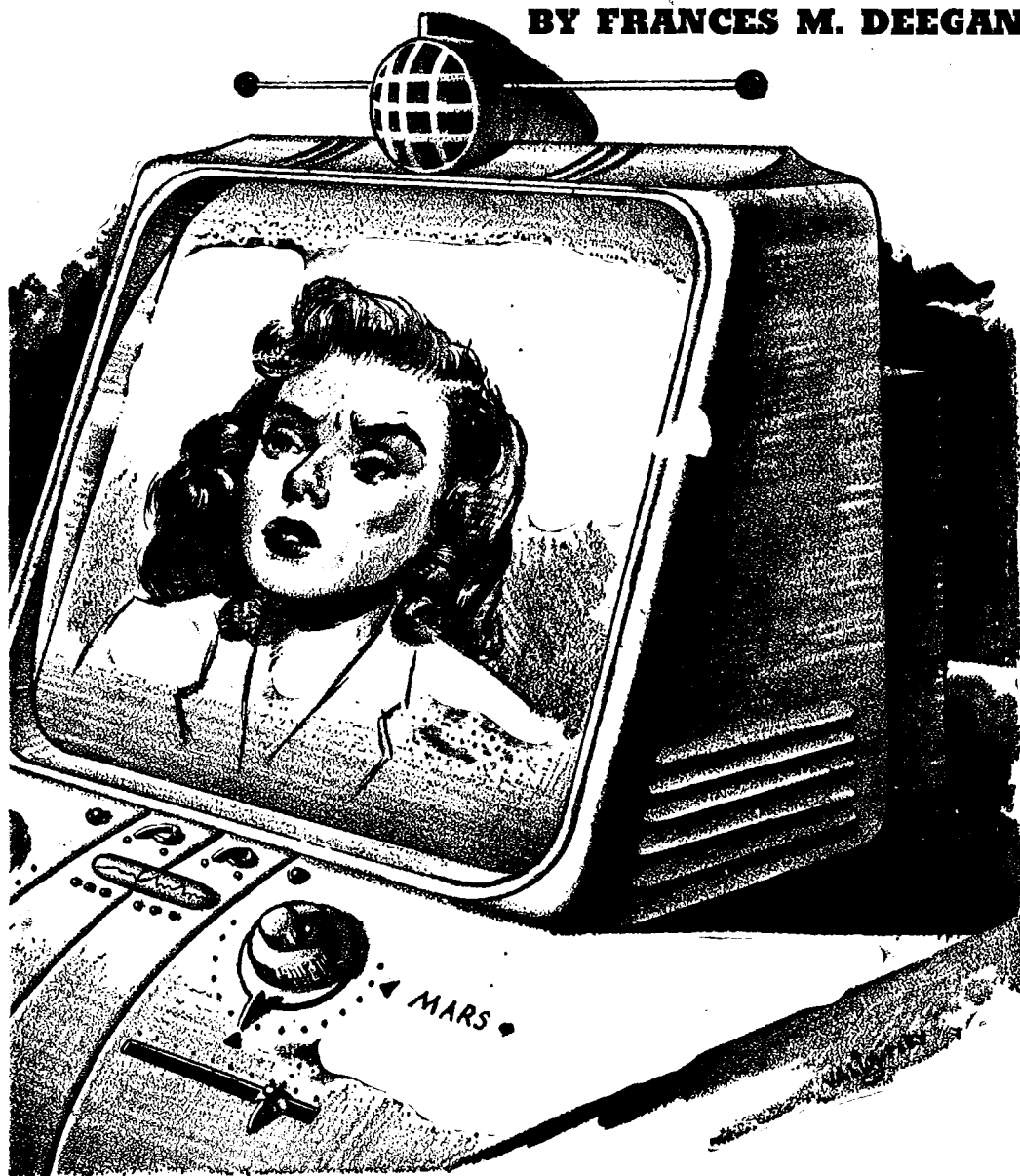
"Get away!" Glenn muttered, brushing aside the angel as Miss Prim's expression lived up to her name

GLENN SCOTT brushed an Angel off his desk and reached toward the visiphone which had just struck four musical notes. It was the familiar combination which signaled a call from the Great Martian Insurance Association. And the caller would almost certainly be the luscious Jersey Prim, the most desirable

and the most difficult of all Earth women as far as Glenn Scott was concerned. He paused momentarily to gather his forces before switching her on.

The Angel fluttered away from him and perched on an antique molded cabinet. And Murk, his long, limber Greeno assistant, lifted a sleepy head

BY FRANCES M. DEEGAN



and opened his pouched eyes, which were pocketed in lower lids and appeared to Earthmen to be upside down. The Martian was coiled limply in a padded armchair, but his opening eyes indicated strong interest in the communication about to take place.

As Mediator between the Martian races and Earthmen, Glenn Scott held an enviable position at Alexandria-on-Mars, the queen city of the Main Continent. His privileges were unlimited, he was highly valued by both worlds, and the esteem which surrounded his person had been termed "universal" by the retiring President of the Chamber of Commerce.

This was an exaggeration. He was not esteemed by everybody. The hairy Slugs were no fonder of him than they were of any other creature. And there were certain Earthmen who were jealous and resentful of his gifts, and would have been glad to lose him on the spongy Martian Tundra. Of these, his most bitter opponent was Oswald U. Sparks, dapper Manager of Boyd's Interplanetary Insurance, whose sharp practices had been curbed by the Mediator's office. Sparks howled to high heaven that he was being persecuted by Glenn Scott in order to eliminate competition in favor of the Great Martian Insurance Association. But Glenn's sole interest in the GMI was centered in the dashing person of Miss Jersey Prim, secretary to the Managing Director. And all his success as Mediator of two worlds did him no good with the independent Miss Prim.

Her vibrant, dark-eyed beauty flashed on abruptly as Glenn touched the visiphone switch, and she gazed at him antagonistically.

"GMI calling Mediator," she said crisply.

"Hello, honey," Glenn answered

hopefully. "You look lovely and bed-roomy with your hair mussed up that way. I want to see you tonight."

Her black eyes heated with indignation, and she repeated: "GMI calling Mediator. I am instructed to inform you that Inspector Harley Kane has arrived on Liner 36."

"All right. I'm informed. I've got to see you tonight, Sugar. I'm leaving town for a trip through the Provinces very shortly, and there are several things I want to straighten out with you before I go. I'll take you to dinner at—"

"Inspector Harley Kane has requested immediate consultation with Mediator," Jersey declared coldly. "Will you please state time and place of convenience?"

"No. If he is after that slick crick-et, Sparks, let him consult the Chamber of Commerce. My time is fully engaged, except for tonight, and that's all yours. I'm serious about talking to you, Jersey. You can't go on being jealous of the Angels. You know I love you, but my position requires a close association with the Martian races—"

"Too close," she agreed angrily. "It's no use, Glenn. I can't marry you and have those giddy, flitting Angels forever cluttering up my life. They never leave you alone for a moment. It's like—like being infested with Angels!"

"Now, darling, you're exaggerating," Glenn protested innocently. "I am certainly not infested with—" He broke off as a warning glare flashed in Jersey's black eyes. He looked over his shoulder and saw the spangled Angel poised affectionately on the back of his chair with graceful wings spread.

GLENN LOOKED at his Martian assistant accusingly, and Murk's

long, pale face took on the look of an amiable idiot, as it always did when he was about to be bawled out by an Earthman.

"Evidently Murk let one of the creatures get away," Jersey said knowingly. "I suppose he is trying to hold back the usual flock that surrounds you, to keep them out of range of the visiphone. What a shame that this little hussy got away from him!"

"He is not!" Glenn denied. "They are not! There's only this one, and she—"

"I can't imagine what business a female Angel has with the Mediator during office hours. But never mind the excuses. I've heard them all. The fact is, you are never free of the prying, light-fingered creatures, and so we have nothing further to discuss. Will Mediator reconsider an appointment for Inspector Harley Kane?"

"I will not. Since you know so much about the business of Mediator, suppose you give him a consultation. You ought to be able to satisfy him."

"Mediator's suggestion to GMI regarding Inspector Harley Kane will be recorded," Jersey replied efficiently, "and acted upon if possible." She snapped herself off abruptly without the customary polite ending to communications, and Glenn muttered at the blank visiplat before closing his own connection. He eyed the fatuous grin on Murk's countenance.

"Sorry I woke you," he said sarcastically. "You couldn't have been less help."

"I am a daisy," Murk said. "A lazy daisy."

"You," said Glenn, "have not the slightest resemblance to a daisy, which happens to be an inoffensive Earth flower. On the contrary, you are a worthless son of a reptile, with—"

The Angel floated against him and silenced him with softly caressing

wings. The wing growth was a thin, membranous tissue, issuing from the spine and terminating in the arms. It was capable of spreading stiffly in shallow flight, or falling into limp folds when the Angels were at rest. The wing caress was sensual as a kiss.

"All right, Sally," Glenn mumbled under her smothering attentions. "No more coaxing, I have decided." She vibrated against him expectantly, and he stroked her exquisite small form and pressed her close for a moment. "I have decided that we will have a going away party for me after all—beginning tonight at Doctor Craik's emporium of ecstasy."

She gave a flutelike trill of delight and fluttered about the vast room, moving her slender legs in dance motions. "Ooh—happy, happy!" she chanted sweetly. "High and low I sing the news. Happy news. Happy we. Come and go, high and low..." She soared out the window, her brightly decorated body twinkling in the pale, thin Martian sunlight. *

"Craik Doctor will be very pleased to entertain us," Murk grinned. "He has not provided a party for twelve days. But now it is time for Chief Jericho. I regret that I must remind you of business."

"Thanks, but I had not forgotten.

*NOTE:—The Angels, so called by Earthmen because of their winged beauty, belonged to the Martian race of Metamorphosites. They were born as hairy, surly Slugs, and lived in isolated settlements, performing most of the labor on the Main Continent. They produced offspring near the end of the Slug period, after which they were put away in the burial place where the metamorphosis took place. They emerged as gay and beautiful butterfly people, completely changed in appearance and character, and very ingenious in the pursuit of pleasure. The indolent, intellectual Greenos belonged to a different race, and more nearly resembled Earthmen. They governed the Continent without force, and regarded the hard-driving Earthmen with amused tolerance which was often exasperating.

That's why I sent Sally on her way rejoicing. I didn't want the stern Chief of Security and Morals to walk in here and find an Angel in the Mediator's lap at this hour. The Earthmen value my affinity for the Angels, but they disapprove of my affection for them."

"They do not have your gift," Murk sighed. "It is strange that most red-blooded people must learn to love. Their approach to everything, even to each other, is instinctively antagonistic. Whereas we of the green-blooded races love first without question, and only learn to hate long afterwards, when we are forced to it."

"Have you ever hated anyone?" Glenn asked curiously.

"I hate very much," Murk murmured in his softly slurred voice, "certain things and certain creatures." His wide mouth grinned suddenly, displaying tiny pointed teeth. "But love is much more pleasant."

HE LAID his almost hairless head back, humming experimentally, and launched into one of his passionate love songs, addressed to Mrs. Murk. Glenn followed the sound and sense of the intimate tribal dialect, and presently understood that Murk was informing his wife gracefully that he would be late getting home because of important business. He knew that Mrs. Murk, wherever she was, would be tuned to the vibrations sent forth by Murk's melodious message, and would understand very well that her loving husband was headed for another Angel orgy which might last one, two or three days, Martian time.

Such was the easy and pleasant understanding in Martian households, Glenn brooded, in contrast to his own hectic and unsatisfactory pursuit of Miss Jersey Prim. He regarded the

long, limber Greeno almost enviously, and wondered if he really was capable of hatred such as the Earthmen knew.

He did not believe it. He felt sure that Murk had used the word "hate" in a comparative sense. He could not associate active hate with the pleasant, soft-spoken Martians. They could not be conquered by the first aggressive Earthmen who invaded the planet, because they would not fight back, but used a gentle kind of passive resistance which could not be overcome with warfare. They rendered all the expensive Earth weapons useless, by making them unnecessary. And so the Earthmen moved in and established themselves, as they thought; but after more than one hundred Martian years, the infiltration of the alien Earthmen had had no effect on the ancient civilization, and the Earthmen had only begun to solve the mystery of the Martian races.

Murk finished his love song and grinned lazily. "Chief Jericho may spoil the party," he murmured. "He has another problem."

"He has another problem," Glenn agreed, "which embarrasses him even more than a visit to this office, which he avoids like a plague spot, except when he needs help. But if we can't handle the problem for him before the beginning of festivities, he will have to resign himself to patience. The Earthmen will never learn that their problems should properly wait on Martian customs unless we prove it to them. This may be a chance to make an example of a major problem."

"Chief Jericho will make a good example?" Murk inquired, raising his hairless brows dubiously.

"Excellent, since his Department has precedence over all other Earth affairs. Also, it is time we demon-

strated that the Mediator is not to be used carelessly for business purposes. When they begin to move in on me with Insurance Inspectors, and other minor business men—Quit grinning at me, you animated death's head. Of course I'm sore about that inspector. He's probably a handsome young first-timer, and Jersey wanted to impress him. But she ought to know better than to try to push me around."

"It is her way of making love," Murk said dryly. "She loves you with abuse according to the Earth fashion. But if you did not become angry, she would tire of abusing you."

"Maybe you're right," Glenn muttered. "But all the same, I think it is time to show the Earthmen that this office was set up to protect Martian customs, as well as to promote Earth business. I hope Chief Jericho's problem is large and complicated so that we can make an impressive example of the good old Martian custom of pleasure before business."

CHIEF CARL JERICHØ arrived promptly, but he did not use the private entrance to Glenn's large, luxurious office. He had himself announced from the outer business office where several Earthmen were engaged in keeping the records of the Mediator's routine affairs. The Chief was a solid, conscientious Earthman with official dignity, but his small, active eyes took in all the details of Glenn's spacious quarters. And by the time he had placed his large, portly frame in a comfortable armchair, he was satisfied that no Angels were clinging to the ceiling, and no exotic pastimes had been going on in the Mediator's office, as was sometimes reported.

His large, square face showed relief. As head of the Department of Security and Morals, he might have

been embarrassed to find the Mediator engaged in any of the pleasures which were forbidden to other Earthmen.

"I want you to know that the Department fully appreciates the work being done by the Mediator's office," he said with the woodenness of a man who was not given to compliments. "In the past your help and cooperation have been of great value. Great value. Problems which confront us here very often require delicate handling, and—"

The visiphone bell rippled four notes, and Glenn said: "Excuse me, that's a Chamber of Commerce call."

The Chief moved his chair out of range with the instinctive caution of a trained policeman, and Glenn touched the switch and was unexpectedly attacked by the abusive voice and infuriated countenance of Oswald U. Sparks. The dapper manager of Boyd's Interplanetary Insurance fairly glistened with rage. His black eyes glittered, his carefully oiled black hair glistened, and his skin had the shine of a ripe apple.

"Sparks to Mediator," he barked. "This is persecution. This is anything but the fair play which we were led to expect from your plush office. This—"

"What is?" Glenn snapped.

"Is this fair play when you bring an Insurance Inspector here with the connivance of the GMI, but without so much as informing Boyd's? I have just learned that the inspector went directly to the GMI office where he was expected, and where he can get plenty of help to hound me out of business if he wants to believe their wild accusations."

"The inspector is as much of a surprise to the Mediator's office as he is to you," Glenn said stiffly. "I had nothing to do with bringing him

here."

"Nothing to do!" Sparks yelled. "No, of course you would do nothing directly. You are too well schooled in the devious methods of the Martians. I am talking to you before witnesses in the Chamber of Commerce. And I am telling you that your persecution is unjust and uncalled for. You are prejudiced against me and always have been, since the days when you were a mere insurance salesman for the GMI. And now, with the powers of your office behind you, you still favor the GMI and attack me at every opportunity. I tell you this to your face, and before witnesses."

"Is that all?" Glenn asked, eyeing the image of the angry man with cold distaste.

"You know it isn't!" Sparks raged. "We have a long score to settle, and I intend to start fighting back—"

"Let me know when," Glenn interrupted. "At the moment I am engaged with an official of top precedence, and you must excuse me. Mediator to Sparks, terminate."

HE FLICKED the switch, and said: "Sorry, Chief. I won't permit another interruption."

"Sparks made a formal complaint before witnesses," the Chief said thoughtfully. "What's he talking about?"

"Nonsense. The GMI called me a while ago to report the arrival of an Insurance Inspector, and request an interview, which I refused. I referred him to the Chamber."

"You didn't know he was coming here?"

"No. Did you?" Glenn shot back.

"I? Of course not. Arrivals and departures are checked by the Passport Section. Only major irregularities are referred to me."

"Then you, at least, are not going

to talk to me about the Insurance Inspector," Glenn suggested.

"No—no. I've got a serious problem."

"Sorry to hear it, Chief," Glenn smiled disarmingly. "I hope it's not one of your rush orders."

"Orders? I don't give orders to the Mediator's office and you know it. I've come to request your cooperation in a matter which—well, I'll be frank with you, Glenn. The nature of this problem is such that it will require immediate attention."

"Same difference. Not a rush order, but a rush request." Glenn consulted the elaborate chrono set on his desk. "I shall be able to devote exactly twenty-five minutes to your problem, Chief, if you will be good enough to state it."

"Twenty-fi—" Jericho choked and sputtered, looked at the idiotic grin on Murk's green tinged countenance, and coughed raggedly.

"You haven't caught a Gil germ, I trust," Glenn murmured solicitously. The Gil was a lung disorder which afflicted Earthmen who were too active in the thin Martian atmosphere, and usually required prolonged oxidation and reconditioning.

"Certainly not!" Jericho gasped, red-faced and perspiring. "This problem is a difficult puzzle, and your arbitrary time limit was so inadequate as to be ridiculous." He tossed an uncut yellow stone onto the dull surface of the desk where it glittered feebly. "What's that?" he demanded.

"It's an uncut Tima," Glenn replied without picking it up. "Worth about \$3500 Earth-side."

"And this?" The Chief tossed out a larger stone with softly rounded edges and no glitter. It wobbled across the desk and hit the first stone with a soft click.

"That's a Silka, worth about \$35."

"So now we have fully insured shipments going out of here marked 'Tima', with full Tima valuation running into hundreds of thousands of dollars, but which are, in fact, the comparatively worthless Silka."

"A NICE LITTLE problem in funny business," Glenn said. "But it will be difficult to determine who is guilty, because the general shipments are paid for with government funds which are deposited in the General Martian account and disbursed to the various companies doing business on Mars upon presentation of claims. And the claims are based on certified business records, showing amount and type of treasure received for each transaction. Received. But not shipped. In short, you are convinced that somebody here in Alexandria is getting away with a fortune in uncut Tima."

"You have stated the problem," Jericho acknowledged curtly.

"And how was the funny business discovered?"

"There was..." The Chief glanced at the sleepy Martian whose odd eyes were turned up to the ceiling, "there was an accident at the Earth Port."

"Murk is an enlightened Greeno," Glenn reminded him. "He knows that we have an ingenious variety of accidents on Earth. Judging by your hesitation, I would say that this was a planned accident."

"Explosion. Purpose, attempted robbery. Sealed packages damaged and contents revealed. The malefactors escaped."

"All right. Then your problem would seem to start at the Alexandrian warehouses where the Martian treasure collected by Earthmen is received and processed for general shipment."

"You've put your finger on the weak link in the process. Inspection has be-

come very lax, not only because of the large volume of shipments, but because there has never before been any reason to doubt the declarations made by business men here. A shipper declares so many ounces of Tima, the weight is verified without removing the original wrappings, and the stones are consigned to the general shipment and their identity is lost."

Glenn's pleasant, friendly Earth face suddenly took on a blank Martian look, and Jericho's small eyes looked away uneasily, as if he were trying to fix on something less disturbing than the change which had taken place in the Mediator's expression.

"You are very close to implying that there may have been some connivance when the stones were collected," Glenn said coldly. "And that means you suspect the Martians of having a hand in the funny business."

"Innocently, of course."

"Ignorantly is what you mean. But the Martians do nothing ignorantly. They know. And their valuation of the Tima and the Silka is very similar to the Earth standard. The soft, muddy Silka has no more value on Mars than it has on Earth. Isn't that true, Murk?"

"True." Murk's bottom lids dropped as his eyes slid downward in a direct look which was no longer sleepy. "As a jewel the Silka has no value."

"THEREFORE," GLENN said distinctly, "the Chief of Security and Morals is convinced that the Martians have finally learned the criminal ways of Earthmen, and have begun to practice them—with considerable success."

"No—no!" Jericho protested sharply. His big face had reddened again with discomfort. "It is contrary to policy and tradition to accuse any

Martian of an Earth crime."

"And that's why you want to dump your problem in my lap," Glenn said with hard emphasis. "Because you know that the Martian dogma of non-injury is sacred, and that up to now no Martian has ever been convicted of theft or double-dealing. You are in a position to know this better than any other Earthman in Alexandria. And still you are not willing to let go of your Earth prejudice and suspicion. You still view the Martian psychology as a thing of guile and shameless deception, because it is so different from the practical, hardheaded, dog-eat-dog character of Earthmen. And so you want to give me the responsibility of accusing the Martians of crime. Such responsibility is entirely beyond the purpose of this office. Mediator must regretfully inform the Chief of the Department of Security and Morals that cooperation in the matter of the Silka substitution is refused."

Chief Jericho rose with dignity and bowed rigidly. "Refusal of Mediator will be recorded and incorporated in the full report of the matter discussed." He stalked out of the softly carpeted office like a full-bodied Martian Bozo Bird crossing the treacherous Tundra.

"You made a speech," Murk observed admiringly.

"I also made an enemy."

"How sad," Murk sighed. "The brotherhood of man is a very tough proposition, full of anger and blows and bad words. But the communion of Greenos is very sweet and loving."

Glenn glanced sharply at his assistant. His unaccustomed anger had caused him to lose the thread of meaning which ran through all the Martian's conversation. But if the idle remarks had any bearing on the present situation, he was unable to make the connection because Murk launched at

once into melodious communion with his friend, Dr. Craik. He sang of the bond of friendship and lauded the art of the Greeno metaphysician who healed the spirit as well as the body. And this he did, not only for the Martian races, but for the brotherhood of men of Earth as well.

NOT FOR THE first time, Glenn Scott felt a tremor of sensual awareness run through his alien, red-blooded body as the Martians communicated with each other through the vibration of sound waves. Most Earthmen discounted the importance of this Martian gift, because it was totally beyond their understanding, and they considered it to be one more idle pastime which the Martians were incapable of putting to practical use. But Glenn had actually begun to experience the effect of the sound waves and was fully receptive to the experience. He knew now by his own sensations that he was included in the bond of friendship, and was also being recommended to Dr. Craik for special attention. But he could not grasp the exact nature of that attention, whether it was to be solemn induction into yet deeper Martian mysteries, or merely a new form of entertainment for the coming festivities.

He closed his eyes and let the sensual pleasure of the sound vibrations stroke his nerves. But he felt sure that there was no more than friendly communication in the half understood song. And when Murk finished on a long note of satisfaction, Glenn said casually: "Very sweet and loving. I feel it too, but I am unable to understand the full sense of these communications."

"You still have much to learn," Murk murmured. "But you have made more progress in understanding than any other Earthman before you. Your

own people do not know this as well as we Greenos do. That is why we are willing to open our secrets to you as you become ready for them. But you must be very careful never to misuse them."

Glenn stared at the amiable Greeno with some astonishment. This was an unusually direct speech for a Martian, and it sounded a grave note of warning which chilled him with a sense of mysterious foreboding.

For the first time he felt an Earthly fear of the strange gifts of the languid Greenos. He was one of the rare Earthmen who could fraternize with the Martian races without losing his grip on Earthly reality and "going native". But too many strong red-blooded men had been destroyed by the Martian hedonism, which reduced them quickly to besotted, mindless wrecks. It was the old story of the human tendency to misuse strange delights and sensuous pleasures in over-indulgence.

"Craik Doctor will be very pleased to see us," Murk murmured. And Glenn knew that the Martian was reassuring him with the apparently casual remark. Murk was telling him that the brilliant Greeno metaphysician was a friend, and that Glenn would be in good hands if he explored the Martian mysteries under the doctor's supervision.

"He is very kind," Glenn responded in the Greeno dialect.

HE TURNED back to his desk with a sigh, and switched on the recording tape which reported the essential data of the routine business handled by the Mediator's office, and also recorded news flashes of important events.

Instantly, the mechanism set up a warning ting-ting and blinked red to indicate a vital news flash. There followed a terse report of the violent

death encountered by Mr. Jack Spratt, citizen of Earth and first-timer on Mars, who had just disembarked from Liner 36. The news flash was timed two hours previously, but Chief Jericho had not known about it when he called on the Mediator. Jack Spratt had been beaten about the head and his features all but obliterated, and the skin of his hands and feet and various other parts of his nude body had been scraped raw, as if he had struggled with some rough substance. His clothes and other possessions were scattered about the area where he was found.

Jack Spratt had been on his way from the Port outside Alexandria to take over his duties as Assistant Manager of Boyd's Interplanetary Insurance. But Oswald U. Sparks, Resident Manager of the company, was unable to account for the violent end of his much needed assistant, although he hinted darkly at persecution by unidentified forces.

Glenn's wide mouth tightened with anger. This may have been what Sparks was leading up to when he assailed the Mediator in the presence of witnesses at the Chamber. He could have known about the murder, even if Chief Jericho did not. And he could have seized the opportunity to start an attack and follow it up with black rumors which would cast suspicion on the Mediator. Sparks was, in fact, behaving like a cornered rat, and Glenn instinctively suppressed the unpleasant suspicion which was forming in his own mind. There was no proof that Sparks was involved in the Silka substitution.

The usual warning followed the report: "This is a restricted news item, intended for the information of Earthmen only, and not to be published, broadcast, or otherwise disseminated, until the official report is re-

leased. Restricted... Restricted... Restricted..."

Glenn reflected wryly that the restrictions might better have been applied to Earthmen, rather than the Martians. The official report would be considerably toned down for the Martians, and the violent demise of Mr. Jack Spratt would be referred to as an accident. Glenn switched off the recorder and looked across the room at his Martian assistant, whose mental processes were not nearly so obscure to him as they were to the men responsible for Martian censorship.

He knew that Murk would be able to decipher the official report with amazing accuracy, but with Martian politeness would appear to accept the official version. He would never discuss it on any other basis, even among the Greenos. But still there would be complete knowledge and understanding under the surface politeness.

MURK WAS once more coiled in the armchair in limp repose, and with his pouched eyes closed. Slowly he lifted a long supple arm which ended in six long, slender digits, and delicately he scratched his flat nose with the middle digits. After which the arm subsided gently into the heap of seemingly boneless indolence, which was nevertheless capable of such complex mental activity that much of it was beyond the comprehension of Earthly intelligence. These Greenos could, if they willed it, far surpass any evil yet conceived on Earth. But in spite of having full knowledge and unusual advantages, they did not will it. They were not tempted, as red-blooded men might have been—and often were.

Glenn felt a sudden flush of anger at the memory of Chief Jericho's problem, and the stolid official's attempt to blame the Martians for the Silka substitution. But now the murder of Jack Spratt, following so

closely on the scheme to rob the government, jarred Glenn with the realization that crime, all unexpectedly, had become a major problem on Mars. For decades there had been no major crimes among the Earthmen on Mars, and now, suddenly, there were two, which would inevitably lead to more.

The realization sobered him, and he understood now that Chief Jericho must have been fairly desperate when he came to Glenn with the suggestion that the Mediator might help him solve the Silka substitution by implicating the Martians. Obviously the Chief could find no other angle to work on, and hoped to handle the delicate job through Glenn's extraordinary powers. But he had underestimated the Mediator's staunch faith in the Martians.

Glenn's flat refusal to have anything to do with the problem had been prompted by anger, but now he had begun to feel a certain responsibility which the Chief's rugged approach had failed to rouse in him. Now he put his full attention on the problem of the Silka substitution, and several queer aspects of the crime struck him.

If an Earthman shipped worthless Silka and hoarded the valuable Tima, he was going to find it virtually impossible to get his bulky fortune in uncut stones transported to Earth markets. General shipments of Martian treasure, consigned to the government, went through without question. But private shipments were scrutinized and taxed all out of proportion to protect the government controlled monopoly. And here on Mars Earthmen were forbidden to use Tima or any other Martian product in trade. Glenn grimaced as he saw where his thought was leading him.

IN THE PAST, Earthmen had used Martian treasure in illegal trade

and to purchase forbidden pleasures. Therefore the use was banned, and under the present system each Earthman in good standing carried a credit card. The only money in circulation was in the form of coins of small denomination which were exchanged among Earthmen, but had no value to the Martians.

Therefore, there was no way of disposing of a hoarded fortune in uncut stones on Mars unless, as Chief Jericho supposed, the Martians were participating in the crime. According to the Chief's theory, the Martians were helping to substitute the worthless Silka for Tima, and also cooperating in the illegal disposal of the treasure here on Mars. The ugly possibilities in this theory were endless: Corruption, bribery, and all the evils spawned by wealth and power in criminal hands.

Glenn shook his head grimly and switched on the recorder again. He followed the routine business reports with half his attention while he was mulling over the problems presented by Chief Jericho and Jack Spratt. Obviously, the Chief's theory about the substitute gems was faulty, and therefore it was not surprising that he could find no angles to work on. Glenn refused to consider the possibility that the Martians might be in any way involved in the crimes. Therefore he had to find another theory to explain the Silka substitution. Why would anyone substitute the soft, cheap Silka for Tima, if not to acquire an unusable fortune in Tima?

After the shipments of worthless stones arrived at the Earth Port, they would be stored in the government warehouses and might remain there for some time before the experts got around to grading the gems for Earth markets. Meanwhile, the shipments would be paid for on the basis of de-

clarations, and when the experts finally opened the falsely declared packages, it would be discovered, much too late, that the government had been cheated. True, the crooked shipper would have sold cheap Silka at high Tima valuation, but what would be the point of taking such a grave risk if the genuine Tima which he withheld could not be disposed of profitably—except, of course, with the cooperation of the Martians. Which was impossible...

GLENN'S attention was caught by an odd report on the slowly moving tape, and he pressed the duplicator button, and shortly pulled a copy of Case Report 392 out of the machine. He read it again, and whistled like a blackbird, and Murk's sleepy head lifted.

"Listen to this," Glenn muttered. "The Greeno tribe of Pog in the Southeast desert bought group insurance from Oswald U. Sparks in a total volume of \$700,000. Total premiums run close to \$50,000. Pog endeavored to pay the premiums with 15 ounces of first grade Tima, which was refused. Get it?"

"Turned down," Murk yawned.

"Wake up, will you? This is—Listen, the valuable Tima were refused and 150 pounds of Silka were demanded. 150 pounds! Pog reports that his tribe is unable to furnish any such amount of Silka. There is no Silka in the desert, and they have only a few ornaments bought elsewhere. He appeals to the Mediator to invoke the law which declares genuine Tima to be an acceptable specie in all transactions. And he is quite right. Old slick-trick Oswald not only outsmarted himself on that deal, he has implicated himself in the crooked Silka substitution. What a fool he is!"

"A bad fool," Murk agreed. "The

tribe of Pog is remote and out of touch with cities. The bad fool assumed that Pog would not know about the law."

"And this is why Earthmen charge the Martians with guile and deceit," Glenn said bitterly. "Because Pog behaved like a simple tribesman and did not display his full knowledge, Oswald Sparks thought he saw a chance to get a big load of Silka for his crooked scheme. He thought no one would ever hear about it if Pog paid off with Silka."

"There is no Silka in the southeast desert," Murk said.

"Of course not. He should have found that out before he demanded such a big—" Glenn broke off and shot a look of comprehension at his placid assistant. "There is no Silka in the desert," he said slowly, "but Pog could have gotten it from another tribe if he wanted to go through with the insurance deal on that basis. Instead, he filed an honest complaint with the Mediator's office—because he knew that the Silka would be used for a dishonest purpose. Pog was certainly well informed!"

"Oh, yes," Murk sighed. "The bad fool was becoming dangerous. It was time for the Earthmen to suppress him."

"I see." Glenn studied the Martian thoughtfully. It seemed that the remote tribe of Pog had been a natural trap, utilized for the downfall of a bad fool. Oswald Sparks had not been tempted in any way. He could have closed a legitimate insurance deal on an honest basis, and profited therefrom. But he had chosen to take advantage of Pog to promote a crooked scheme, and the supposedly ignorant tribesman had let matters take their course in accordance with the Earthmen's laws.

THERE WAS a vast and terrible implication in this idea of the

Martian ability to turn a man's own wickedness against him, and thus allow him to destroy himself in his own time.

"It seems that for all their haste, the Earthmen are sometimes regrettably slow," Glenn said carefully. "You knew this thing, and other well-informed Greenos knew it, but you maintained your admirable practice of non-interference. On Earth we have an ancient law concerning knowledge of crime, which declares that withholding information from the proper authorities amounts to participation in the crime as an accessory. In this case, perhaps it might have been better to tell."

"To tell you," Murk agreed. "It was intended. But to tell you prematurely would have placed an uncomfortable burden on your mind and heart. Here on Mars we have knowledge of creatures and things. I regret that the matters of Earth are beyond our knowledge and control. This accident which occurred at the Earth Port has precipitated the problem of the Silka substitution prematurely. It was," the Martian repeated apologetically, "beyond our control."

"I understand," Glenn nodded. "But now that it has been precipitated?"

"Now it is time." Murk unwound himself carelessly and swayed out of the chair, rising to a height of seven feet, and looking like a human who had been pulled through a knothole. "Less-go," he added.

"Where to?"

"Craik Doctor will be expecting us." Murk glided effortlessly toward the private exit and paused. He began to sway restlessly, as if disturbed, and an unpleasant sensation ran along Glenn's nerves. The Martian undulated, gliding slowly backward until he reached his chair, where he collapsed nervelessly.

"Visitors," he yawned wearily, and the idiotic grin appeared like a mask on his long face.

Glenn moved back to his desk and sank into his chair in an attitude of ease. There was an unaccountable feeling of dislike flowing through him, and with it the sensation of an unnameable odor with a stifling quality of putrescence. In a flash of revelation, he knew what it was. The events of this day had imperceptibly led to a climax in his relations with the Greenos, and with Murk in particular. The climax had come when they had spoken openly and directly about the knowledge of the Silka substitution. In that moment they had reached a point of understanding more intimate than ever before.

IN A CURIOUSLY unnoticeable way, almost unconsciously, Glenn had passed through one of the soft, but impassable veils which obscured the Greeno intellect from men. And now that he was through it, he was aware of the sensations Murk was experiencing as the visitors approached. And he knew what they meant. This was the "smell of antagonism" which the Greenos sometimes mentioned regretfully as one of the less pleasant attributes of Earthmen. If all men smelled as badly as this, Glenn reflected sardonically, the Greenos had been enduring unspeakable torment in their relations with the aggressive Earthmen. Bad blood, he thought suddenly. That was what it smelled like... bad blood...

He was fully composed; and nearly as indolent as Murk when the light tapping came on the door.

"Enter!" he called pleasantly, and immediately experienced a shock.

Jersey Prim entered, bright and tense with excitement. There was a tall, dark-faced Earthman behind her.

Glenn recovered himself and got to his feet, bowing with mock ceremony. "The redoubtable Miss Prim," he said gayly. "Arrived in person to batter down my door for the Insurance Inspector. I admire your persistence, to say nothing of your other, more enticing charms."

"Please, Glenn. This is terribly important!" Jersey said breathlessly. Her dark eyes were sparkling, and the lovely rich color was flushing her face and throat with vivid life. "This is Harley Kane, but he is not an Insurance Inspector. Harley, this is Mediator Glenn Scott."

The brown-faced man nodded curtly, and Glenn stiffened against him instinctively. There were hard glints in his green-gray eyes, and hard lines in his face. Wordlessly, he held out a small round case which snapped open to reveal the insignia of the Federal Intelligence Division of the Earth Government.

And Glenn was nearly overcome by the smell of antagonism. He sank into his chair, gasping a little, and muttered: "Won't you sit down—over there?"

Kane glanced at the lazy heap in Murk's chair, and barked: "Get rid of that."

"I beg your pardon?" Glenn said softly.

"Oust the animal," Kane snapped. "This is confidential."

"The fault is mine," Glenn murmured apologetically, and got to his feet again, "I neglected to introduce my assistant, the Honorable Murk, first son of the Tribe of Murk, and Councillor of the Martian Government. He is an integral part of this office."

Kane eyed him contemptuously. "You're Mars-happy, Scott. Cut it out!"

"Please, Glenn," Jersey pleaded

again, almost tearfully.

"Sit down," Glenn said harshly. "And shut up."

She was startled by his rude tone, but sat nervously on the edge of a wide chair.

"As a first-timer," Glenn told the belligerent Kane, "I will excuse your insulting manner, but only on condition that you mend your manners from here on. Evidently you are under the impression that you have some business with this office. I doubt if you have. But now that you are here, you may state your business briefly."

THEY BOTH remained standing and glaring at each other coldly.

"Fine," Kane said flatly. "You're doing just fine. Very good act. I realize you have to put up a front and lay on the ceremony in a setup like this. But I was hoping we could take off the gloves and skip the ceremony. The situation calls for plain, fast talk. I'll have to brief you on the details. They are restricted and confidential."

"The explosion and attempted robbery at Earth Port are already known in this office," Glenn repressed a gleam of satisfaction as the Earthman gave a start of surprise. "By the way, who killed Jack Spratt?"

"Smart," the Earthman snarled. "Awfully smart. Too blasted, awfully smart. You're under arrest, Scott. By authority of the Federal Intelligence Division. Resistance is death." He held an acid-ray tube.

"Not necessarily," Glenn murmured, and glanced at the trembling, dark-eyed beauty, whose color had bled out of her soft cheeks. "If only," he said painfully, "you hadn't come."

"I think," Jersey said firmly, getting out of the chair and straightening her business robe, "I think it is just as well I did come. You have done everything possible to arouse Officer

Kane's suspicions. And he can hardly be blamed if he suspects you of complicity in the crime he is investigating."

"Stay out of this!" Kane said roughly.

"Sorry, officer, but I am already in it," Jersey retorted pertly. "I am responsible for bringing you here. And before you go any further with this nonsense about arresting Glenn Scott, I feel that it is my duty to point out that you are making a serious mistake. I must—I must insist that you reconsider."

She had taken a few steps to place herself between the two men, and now as she faced Kane, with her back to Glenn, he noted that her legs were trembling. She was, in fact, terrified. In spite of her attempt to appear firm and businesslike. He started toward her with the intention of putting her aside gently, but one of Murk's long arms snaked out to grasp her ankles, jerking her off her feet as the small, deadly tube in Kane's hand spit blue fire.

GLENN LEAPED at the murderous Earthman in a blind rage, and the impact carried them both down in a slow fall. Kane's fist was still tightly wrapped about the acid-ray tube, but Glenn was able to handle himself far better than the inexperienced first-timer, whose strenuous Earth-side tactics were not nearly so effective in the thin atmosphere and decreased gravity of Mars. Glenn got one knee against his abdomen and pressed, forcing the breath out of him, and flattening him on his back. But Glenn's grip on the arm holding the weapon was slipping as Kane unleashed amazing strength, pulling at Glenn with one arm while slowly and painfully raising the other out of his grasp. It was a contest of strength and

will, and could not last. Kane's sinewy wrist flipped and the thin, blue acid-ray spit venomously downward as Glenn let go his grip and flattened himself against the other man's straining body, gasping for breath. Deliberately, he pushed a hand toward the man's face and pressed his fingers into the eyes so that Kane screeched with pain, and tried to writhe away from the relentless pressure. Glenn rolled slowly, letting his entire weight rest on the arm which still held the weapon, and with a final effort, got his fingers on the tube and wrenched it out of Kane's grip. The smell of antagonism was a stench in his brain.

Very slowly he dragged himself away from the hard, brown Earthman who was blinded and exhausted for the moment, making agonizing efforts to draw sufficient air into his Earth-born lungs. Glenn's vision was blurred from over-exertion and he saw only dimly that Jersey was lying on a divan chair across the room, and Murk was there, swaying with uncertain motion above her. It was useless to try to hasten the recovery of his senses, but he began to crawl towards them, fearful and helpless.

He was aware that someone entered through the private door, heard a suave, polite voice, and knew that Dr. Craik had arrived with miraculous promptness. He continued to crawl across the soft, thick carpet until Murk came and lifted him bodily and put him in a chair. The deadly tube was removed from his hand and an oxygen inhaler was placed against his face. Quickly his body absorbed the life-giving gas, and as his vision cleared, his fears strengthened and were finally confirmed. Neither he nor Murk had been quick enough, and the acid-ray had struck Jersey on the upper arm. Even as he looked at her the poison was spreading through her

blood stream, killing her with silent, insidious speed.

HE MADE no sound, but his anguish seemed to touch the Greeno metaphysician, who turned to him, and said gently: "Reassure yourself, friend of my love. She will not die. No, she will not die. The poison is arrested. I have been in time. But she will require great care afterwards. The remedy is almost as dangerous as the deadly poison."

Murk brought a glass of gleaming, pale liquid, and Glenn said: "Thank you," in the Greeno dialect. He drank the aromatic Martian liquor and felt the strength returning to his nerves and muscles.

"She will not die," he repeated huskily. "Why?"

"Craik Doctor will explain," Murk murmured. "It is a healing drug, distilled from powdered Silka, which is very effective in the treatment of red-blooded races. But also very dangerous as a habit-forming drug. The discovery was made by a Greeno physician more than eighty years ago, but it was thought best to conceal it for reasons which you will understand."

"I understand." Glenn put the glass down and looked around at the still prostrate form of Earthman Harley Kane. The man was only partially conscious, and suffering from the debilitating effect of over-exertion. Glenn went to him and ripped off his tunic and undershirt, in spite of feeble efforts to resist the indignity. He backed away from the suddenly increased odor that emanated from the rousing Earthman.

"This man is not what he claims to be," Glenn said to Murk. "If he were a Federal Intelligence officer, he would have a design etched on his body. The design of the F.I. insignia. He is a fraud and a crook. I hope

that not all Earthmen have his bad smell."

"You are aware of it," Murk said gravely.

"I became aware of it for the first time as he approached. The smell of antagonism. I know it now. It is the smell of bad blood. That should have told me what he was. I believe he killed the true F.I. man, and scraped his hands and feet and also parts of his body to eliminate identification by prints or markings. This man is Jack Spratt, the criminal, who was on his way to become assistant to Oswald Sparks. The dead man is Harley Kane, the Intelligence officer who arrived as an Insurance Inspector, to investigate the problem of the Silka substitution. I regret that I must reveal such unpleasantness."

"It is unavoidable," Murk said, "and will require much pleasure to overcome the effect."

"Oh, very much. I am now obliged to recall the angry Chief of Security and Morals, and present him with the solution to the problem of the Silka substitution, which was no substitution at all. The Silka, it seems, has no value whatever as a jewel, but is worth its weight in Tima as an Earth drug."

"Scott!" the man on the floor croaked. "I'll talk. I'll spill. Only for God's sake, give me a shot of Silka. I'm dying!"

"No, you're not," Glenn returned heartlessly. "You'll be sick and weak for a long time, and may develop the Gil, which is a painful lung disease. But you won't die until you are shipped back to Earth for execution."

DR. CRAIK straightened to his full, limber seven feet and beckoned Glenn with long, expressive fingers. Glenn came half-fearfully, in spite of his faith in the brilliant Greeno, and

looked down at the unusually still figure. He had never seen the lively Jersey Prim so relaxed and still.

"She has gone into a natural sleep," Dr. Craik murmured. "It may last for two or three days, while the poison is being eliminated. Afterwards she will have a strong craving for the Silka drug, and will need to be weaned away from it carefully. The drug has amazing restorative properties for red-blooded humans. It combats disease germs and heals injuries with remarkable speed. It imparts a high degree of mental and physical health, and gives the user a sense of power and well-being. For this reason, the human system quickly learns to crave it, but excessive use burns up the mental and physical powers, and reduces the human to a dry husk with a vacant mind. I would not have used the drug, except to save her life."

"You must know that I approve," Glenn said softly. "Will the wounded arm be impaired?"

"I think not. It is already responding to the drug. Look here." Long Greeno digits delicately removed a poultice from Jersey's round white arm. The small wound was barely discolored, but slightly swollen, and already the edges appeared to be growing together.

"A deep wound like that!" Glenn gasped. "It's miraculous. And those fools would have used it to destroy men!" His mind leaped angrily against the men who had schemed to misuse the miracle. "How could they have known about it?"

"The drug was compounded many years ago by a Greeno physician who used it to heal the common lung disorder, the Gil. But the dangers of addiction became apparent at once, and he discontinued the use. It was hoped that if any of the compound got back to Earth, the origin might still re-

main a secret. Evidently some of it did get back, and after all this time Earthmen have succeeded in analyzing and identifying the elements."

"Now that the secret is out, the Government will set up controls. It will not be nearly so disastrous as it might have been if the wrong men had gotten control of the supply." Glenn looked down at the sleeping beauty, and bent to kiss her lightly. "She rejects me, and yet she loves me. She was terrified, and yet she tried to save my life at the risk of her own. There is no Earthly way to express my gratitude."

"This day you have shown a genuine faith in my race," the Greeno murmured deeply. "This also is a rare jewel of friendship, freely given, and needing no expression of gratitude."

EACH PUT a hand on the other's breast, and they remained standing thus in the Greeno bond of friendship for a long moment as the flow of awareness between red blood and green blood united them in unspeakable communion. The moment ended and they lowered their strangely similar hands and smiled their strangely dissimilar smiles of understanding.

But the ineffable pleasure of the moment was rudely razed by the buzzer from the outer office, which snarled insolently under an urgent finger. Glenn stepped to his desk and flipped the communication key, and a startled clerk's voice blared: "Excuse me, sir, but there's a—"

The door from the outer office crashed open and Oswald Sparks came leaping into the room, red-faced and seething with angry effort.

"Look out, you fool!" Glenn warned. "You're over-exerting."

But Sparks was beyond care or caution. "That Insurance Inspec-

tor..." he gasped. "Where is he? He was seen coming here. Jersey Prim brought him in the back way. You lied to me. You're scheming to frame me. I know. I know what you're going to—"

"You must mean him." Glenn flipped a thumb toward the prostrate crook. "The one on the floor."

Sparks saw him then and stared, gulping with surprise and sobbing for breath. His agitation turned to sheer fright.

"Don't you recognize him?" Glenn snapped. "That's your new assistant, Jack Spratt. The man he killed was a Federal Intelligence officer."

"Oh, no...no..."

"Yes!" the man on the floor rasped. He tried to move his heavy, exhausted limbs. "You dingy little dope. Too scared to take any chances at this end. You left it all for us to do. You think it's easy—to high-jack a load from the Government?"

"I knew—I knew it!" Sparks screamed thinly. "You're trying to frame me. Lies...tricks..."

"I have a report on the insurance deal you tried to put over with the tribe of Pog," Glenn said sharply. "What were you going to do with 150 pounds of Silka?"

The man was gasping for breath now, and moving with more difficulty as Murk glided up behind him and delicately picked the pockets of his loose jacket. Too late, he sensed the Martian's nearness and turned with an effort, only to see his own weapons in the hands of the backward-gliding Greeno. One was an old-style Explorer's Model flame gun, and the other was a new-style dart thrower, which could be deadly if poison needle darts were used.

Glenn walked around his desk wearily and beat the already faltering man in the chest and stomach, driv-

ing the air out of him, until he collapsed beside his unhelpful assistant. Glenn apologized to the serene Martians, and returned to his desk to put through a call to Chief Jericho.

"Mediator to Chief of Security and Morals," Glenn said formally as soon as the harassed visage appeared. "A direct request to call at Mediator's office at once."

"Impossible!" the Chief sputtered angrily. "Mediator must know that I have my hands full—"

"Full of unsolved crimes. Mediator does know, and therefore respectfully requests the Chief to call at his office and pick up the criminals who are now littering his floor, together with complete proof of their guilt, which is confidential and restricted, and not to be communicated over the public visiphone."

"What—what?" the bedeviled Chief barked. "Is this one of your pleasant games?"

"Jersey Prim has been seriously wounded."

"Oh. Well, then... Oh, yes, I see. Restricted accident. Can't be discussed. I'll come at once."

THE ANGEL FESTIVAL was in its third day when Jersey Prim roused from flowing dreams of ethereal happiness, and asked at once for Glenn Scott. Because he had anticipated her revival with nice precision, Dr. Craik had kept the Festival more or less under control. And, therefore, it was not too difficult to extricate Glenn from the delightful pleasure maze in which he and Murk, and several other Greeno Councillors, were being entertained.

Jersey looked pale but pretty on the richly furnished couch, and her lively dark eyes had turned languid with Silka dreams. Glenn noted this with a pang of apprehension, realiz-

ing they might have a long, hard battle to cure her of the effects of the drastic remedy.

"Hello, honey," he said awkwardly. "You look lovely—and bedroomy with—everything the way it is."

"I am," she murmured dreamily. "Come and kiss me, Glenn."

"I—Well, no, darling. It might not be good for you if—"

"Glenn, look at me. I am changed. I have tasted the pleasures, too. Dr. Craik has given me something divine. I shall never be without it again. All of my aversion to the Martian pleasures is gone. Come, darling, we will enjoy the forbidden ecstasies together." She lifted soft, white arms and yearned toward him with languid dark eyes.

Glenn groaned within himself, and cried: "Oh, no—no, it can't be this way! Jersey, you are under the spell of a potent drug and you don't know what you're saying. Please don't look at me like that!"

But she continued to urge him with white arms and lustrous eyes, deep with the knowledge of her power, and in spite of himself, his feet began to move slowly toward the fragrant couch. Some frightened, inner part of him knew that they would both be lost if he succumbed now. If ever they tasted the unearthly delights generated by the action of the powerful drug in Jersey's body, they would be forever lost...

A sudden revulsion made him call desperately for the Greeno metaphysician—not aloud, but with his whole being, and with a force that left him trembling and sick. In a moment, Dr. Craik was there, smiling with grave knowingness, and the spell was broken. Jersey sank back against the cushions with a sultry pout, and Glenn turned and left the room, feeling haggard and beaten.

He returned to the Festival on a lower floor, because it was a Martian duty to be present at a Festival in his honor. But for the first time it was not a pleasant duty. He knew that he would not be happy again, truly happy, until Jersey Prim was sufficiently herself to scold him for

playing with the light-minded Angels and indulging in Martian pleasures.

"Speed the day!" he muttered, grinning wryly, "when I can once more get a kick out of a Festival because Jersey is sure to hail and thunder at me for doing it..."

THE END

ANGEL
ON A
PIN POINT

THE ELECTRON microscope has opened up entirely new vistas to the researcher in physics, biology, medicine and many other fields. In the last ten years it has become an indispensable tool in almost all laboratories, and it has changed in size and appearance from a massive, bulky apparatus to a new, smoothly functional gadget no larger than a television set. Magnifications of fifty and a hundred and two hundred thousand diameters are commonplace, with some going higher.

Much more remarkable, though, than the conventional electron microscope is the so-called "field electron microscope" which has been introduced to science during the last year. In a way this is a perfect example of the simplification that often takes place in scientific tools. It consists merely of a glass tube of the size and general shape of a small television cathode ray tube. Within it are two electrodes, one a circular-shaped metal cylinder surrounding a metal point, which serves as the other electrode. A fluorescent screen is at the far end of the tube.

The specimen to be examined (and this is the drawback—it must be metal or crystal or some nonliving material) is attached to the pointed tungsten electrode and a high voltage is applied between the anodes. Electrons are literally torn out of the specimen in conformity with its structure, and on the fluorescent screen appears a perfect atomic or molecular picture of the object! The magnification is of the order of, a million times!

The tool is of prime interest to physicists but, like most such originally esoteric instruments, it will drift into common everyday use in technology, and the world will be the richer for it. Pictures taken with the field electron microscope are incredibly clear images of molecular structure, almost as if one were privileged to gaze right into the atomic heart of the object. You'll hear a lot about the "EE-FF-MM", as it is called, in the next few years!

—by Frederic Booth

NO TAIL FOR TUTTLE!

THE BRILLIANT meteoric displays that color the night sky at various times of the year have long been a mystery to most astronomers. Numerous hypotheses have been advanced—with few takers. Recently, however, an Egyptian astronomer, Hamid by name, has come up with cold facts and figures which prove the source of these amazing meteoric blasts.

Tuttle's Comet, a Solar wanderer which takes one hundred and twenty years to complete its lonely cycle, is the mother of the famous shower which precedes the Perseid shower. Hamid, by rigid calculation, has demonstrated that exactly three hundred and forty-three revolutions ago of the comet, it approached the massive gravitational pull of Jupiter. It approached too closely and large quantities of its gaseous tail were lost. Included in this molecular gaseous matter were countless trillions of tiny particles of solid matter.

Much of this material lay in the Earth's path and time did the rest. Now when our planet sweeps through this volume of space millions of small particles are swept into our atmosphere, where friction at the high velocities of their fall causes them to glow brightly—and briefly.

It is strongly suspected that most meteoric matter can trace its origin to the comets, although still a good deal of it comes from the asteroidal belt which may, in keeping with science-fiction speculation, be a shattered planet.

It is a rather awe-inspiring thing to consider that a trivial Solar incident—in terms of cosmic time, it was even less than an incident—occurring between a planet and a comet forty thousand years ago still casts its shadow today.

The iron-nickel and the glassy stone constitution of meteoric matter of course is still unexplained. The suspicion is that any explanation would lead ultimately to some catastrophic planetary event. It will be a great day in science when such an event can be reconstructed—and it would certainly be a warning!

—by Roy Small

THE DOG WITH THE WEIRD TALE

BY
PAUL W. FAIRMAN



"Go on; keep it up, brother!" I growled under my breath. "But if you lose an arm, don't blame me!"

The next time you try patting a dog on the head, thinking he's man's best friend, just remember that you read the real answer here!

I SAW Tom Crandall for the first time when he came to Scarsdale to get me. Frank Haynes had already left. Myra Haynes was still there, closing up the house. Myra had been crying a lot—like the sentimental idiot she was—and I remember how Tom Crandall stood there opening his big mouth and putting his foot in it.

He said, "Gosh, Myra—I—I—well, I just don't know what to say. When Grace and I heard about it—about you and Frank...splitting up—we just couldn't believe it...just couldn't..."

The big goof was suffering worse than Myra, and she finally had the decency to come to his rescue. She dug one hand into the fur on top of

my neck—a silly habit I'd always hated—and said, "It was... just one of those things, Tom. One of those things."

Here she put on that *brave* smile that was beginning to sicken me. "I guess neither Frank nor I even knows what happened. It was just..."

Tom Crandall dropped down on one knee and grabbed me by the head on both sides and held my nose right in front of his moribund-looking moon-face, until the stench of his tobacco breath almost got me.

I wanted to take a nice big chunk out of his throat, but I was in no position to indulge in luxuries; so I did what was expected of me: I licked a wet tongue across his face and wiggled my rear end in a dignified manner as befits a thoroughbred.

Tom Crandall grinned like a fool and said, "Well, at least you won't have to worry about Prince—his having a good home I mean. We're glad to take him. We always wanted a dog." And he rumbled my ears until I could hardly keep from tearing off one of his.

I was mad clear through. The way he said it, as though he were doing me a favor. Huh! The favor was on my side. There wasn't a dog lover in the country that wouldn't have been delighted to have me.

Myra Haynes was mouthing more of those sobby inanities about the separation, and I decided I just couldn't stand it. I was fed up with that place, so I played coy, frisking about the room and then going over and opening the door with my foot.

Tom Crandall thought that was just too cute for words and Myra got some more tears in her eyes and said, "He—he doesn't seem sad about leaving, does he?"

That dame never spoke a truer word in her life and Tom Crandall

replied, "But Myra—after all! He's only a dog."

I came within an inch of sending the fat goon on a quick trip to the hospital, but I didn't. I swallowed the insult and licked the idiot's hand. But I could see right there we were going to get along just ducky together. Just ducky.

THE BIG laugh of the day came when I watched Tom Crandall climb into the baggage car to ride with me. It was a welcome diversion, too, because I was burning right down to my toe-nails at the thought of having to ride in a baggage car while several hundred two-legged slobs occupied plush seats in the chair cars. What right had they to such comfort while I bumped along in the baggage car? I was cleaner, more beautiful, and a lot more intelligent than ninety per cent of them!

But, as I said, I watched Tom Crandall climb into the car, dragging his fat tub of lard up behind him and I laughed right in his face.

You know what I found out? You couldn't insult that dullard. He laughed right back at me. When he finally got his lamp-post legs under him, he rumbled my ears and said, "Anyhow, I'm glad you're happy, fella. Glad you're not taking it to heart the way Myra is."

I backed away from his clumsy hands and he sat down on a packing case and wiped his fat puss with a linen handkerchief. I snarled to myself. Linen yet! And they'll probably expect me to sleep on some old rags.

Just then the train started and a flunky who looked as though he'd just gotten off a ten-day bender came over and said, "Nice-looking dog you got there, mister. A real beauty."

I gave him a wide-open sneer, not trying in the least to hide it. After all, there's a limit to what one is

forced to endure. Maybe I had to cater to the moon-faced bubble-head who was taking me home, but I certainly didn't have to get chummy with roustabouts.

"Shooty too," the flunky said. "Just like all thoroughbreds. But pretty."

Thoroughbred was right, and I sure felt like telling him. My ancestors could be traced back to the finest canine stock ever bred. His probably went back to some dark alley where his father had met his mother one night and then moved on.

Tom Crandall said, "No—he's usually friendly, but all this is new to him. He's a little scared."

How stupid, I wondered, could a man be? I've never been scared of anything in my life—unless it was a bigger dog.

The flunky said, "He should be muzzled. It's regulations."

"Oh, he'll be all right," my *master* returned. "This chain will be enough. He's perfectly behaved."

Put a muzzle on me? I'd like to have seen that character try it! I'd have ripped off his arm at the shoulder and used it for a club to beat his brains out.

The flunky went away then, leaving me so disgusted I could no longer stand Tom's simpering face, so I lay down for a nap. In order to keep up the act, I laid my chin across Crandall's feet in a very trusting manner. I could feel his corns popping under the leather of his oversized number tens. It made me happy to know his feet hurt and he probably wouldn't move them for fear of disturbing me. I went to sleep thinking what a prize ass I'd drawn for an owner.

From there out the trip was uneventful.

WHEN THE train stopped at the very ordinary-looking town in which I was to live, they opened the

door to let us out. Tom Crandall stood in front of me waiting to jump down. He hung poised in the open doorway and it was a sore temptation to give him a push. It would have been an accident, of course, and he'd have landed on his fanny in a bed of nice sharp cinders. I decided not to do it though; until I got the lay of the land it was better to stay under wraps, so to speak.

Instead, I whined to be helped down. He held out his arms and I put on the coy act for all I was worth. When I figured he was off balance, I jumped.

I hit him as hard as I could. I weigh seventy-five pounds and I was sure I could knock him down and maybe ruin his suit, but he got his balance and eased me to the ground. He said, "Don't be scared, boy. Nobody's going to hurt you."

Hurt me! I'd liked to have seen some stupid jerk try! But to keep up the act, I whimpered a little and slobbered all over his face while he put me down.

Grace was waiting with the car—if that's what the pile of iron she drove could be called. It was a '47 model—two fenders dented; one of those jobs you have to keep locked or the junk man will hook on and haul it away.

Grace got out of the car looking as happy as though she's just inherited a million dollars. She dropped to her knees and put her arms around my neck, and I took it in a dignified manner because the commuters were looking at me as they passed and I wanted to appear at my best.

Grace said, "Poor old Prince! You don't have to worry any more, sweet-ums. You're going to have a good home from now on."

We all got into the car and she said, "Oh, Tom! The baby will just love him!"

I almost let out a yipe. A brat

yet! And, me, loving peace and quiet the way I do. I thought of Frank and Myra Haynes and I put a canine curse on them. They could at least have had the decency to get me a place without children. Being a thoroughbred, my nerves are very sensitive. I can't take a lot of yammering. Sleep is very important to me.

A baby in the house! That made it a perfect day!

But then I got to thinking. There were angles—and angles. Maybe a baby would come in handy.

It was about ten blocks to the Crandall home and I'll say one thing for them: it wasn't bad. A white two-story frame with a nice big lawn to be dug up and enough flower beds to keep me busy all summer. Not bad at all. There were a couple of places a lot of dirt could be dug away from the foundation without any trouble at all.

AFTER WE put the car in the garage, Grace went next door and got the baby from a neighbor who was minding him. The way Grace carried him home, you'd have thought he was something to be proud of. Actually, he was only a standard garden variety—a pink and white job who'd probably grow up to be the same type of moron his father was.

Grace goo-gooed at him and insisted on straddling him across my back. I didn't like it and neither did Junior, but one must cater to the infantile tendencies of parents.

When they finally gave me a little lime to myself, I checked over the place. As I said before, it wasn't bad. They'd parked an overgrown sofa pillow under the kitchen sink. That, no doubt, was supposed to be my bed. But I had news for them. The sofa in the living room suited my tastes much better.

The first crisis came that evening

during dinner. Grace put a plate of fried chicken on the table. I was plenty hungry and banged my tail against the wall in approval. Then I saw my dish! And what do you suppose was in it?

Dog food!

I don't think I was ever so insulted in my life. A piece of dead horse put into a can by some opportunist and peddled to the public on the theory that dogs will eat anything.

I took one sniff at the stuff and then walked out of the dining room with my nose in the air. I went into the front hall and curled up on the mat while those two goons held a conference over the horse meat.

They smelled it and poked around in it with a fork and then Tom came trotting in to me carrying the dish. He put that idiotic look of enthusiasm on his face, and said, "Come on boy. Suppertime. Come on and eat the nice red meat."

I got up and walked away from him.

Finally, they caught on and Grace fixed up a plate of chicken and potatoes and gravy for me. I wanted to dive right into it, but I wasn't going to let them off as easy as that. I put a sad look and walked away again, back into the hallway. Tom was going to bring me my dinner in there. Then maybe they'd remember.

But you know what the fools did? They had another conference and decided I was too upset from my trip to eat that night. In all my life I'd never bumped into such stupidity.

I was so hungry I could hardly wait until they went to bed so I could get at that chicken. I waited though. I wasn't going to let them see me give in.

After eating, I jumped on the lounge and went to sleep.

FOR A few days everything went all right. I laid around the house and had fun letting Grace try and coax me to move when she wanted to sweep or vacuum. She'd go through all sorts of persuasive antics. I enjoyed it a lot.

The rest of the time I spent in the yard letting the neighbors admire me. I guess it wasn't often they'd seen a dog of my classic lines. Whenever any of the neighborhood brats came into the yard I got rid of them by showing my teeth and growling very low so the sound wouldn't carry far. It would have been more fun to really go after them and take a few pieces out of their pants, but I didn't want to get it noised around that I was vicious. A dog has to look out for his reputation.

As I said, everything went fine for a few days. Then one morning Grace came down and found me sleeping on the lounge. She'd evidently had a hard night or something because she didn't ask me to get off. She told me. Then she got the hand-vac and cleaned the hairs off the fabric, yacking at me all the time she was at it.

It wasn't any surprise to me, really. I'd suspected all along she was a fishwife at heart and now she was proving it. Tom came downstairs then and Grace said, "Tom, that dog's got to stay in the kitchen nights. I can't have him ruining this sofa. After all, we paid ten dollars for the pillow we bought him."

Ten dollars for a pillow! Ten lousy bucks! The lounge probably cost three hundred, so it was too good for me. Prince can stay in the kitchen. He's only a dog and a dog just hasn't got any rights.

Tom took me by the collar and dragged me out into the kitchen. He pointed to the pillow under the sink, as though he were dealing with a mental incompetent, and said, "That's

your bed, Prince. The pillow. See? No more sleeping on the lounge."

All the while I was thinking how nice it would be to rip his arm clear down to the bone. I didn't do it though. There are so many things a dog would like to do that he can't.

I was burned up all day over the incident. I finally got so mad I dug a nice big hole in the pansy bed while Grace was upstairs taking a nap.

That was some satisfaction, but not enough, so I went into the kitchen looking for a chance to get even. The chance came when Grace put a veal roast in the oven. They had one of those new-fangled stoves that was covered with dials. You put the meat in, set the flame, and then set another dial to turn the stove off when the meat is done. Grace set the time dial at two hours. After she went upstairs to take care of the baby, I pushed the time dial up to four hours and increased the fire as high as it would go. Then I went outside and waited.

TOM CAME home at the usual time and found the hole in the pansy bed. I knew I was on the spot so I went into the frisky-puppy act. Tom was mad as a hatter, but I softened him up in a hurry and after that he was putty in my hands.

He went to the garage and got a shovel and filled up the hole while I made it as hard for him as I could, licking his face and getting in the way. But the fool liked it.

When he got through fixing the flower bed, he took my paw in his hand and said, "We won't tell anybody about this, huh, fella? Just a secret between us two."

He looked so silly squatting there I had to laugh in his face. Talk about one of the Juke boys! He filled the role perfectly.

And they pick up stray dogs in the

street, I thought to myself as we went in the house. Pick up stray dogs and let characters like Tom Crandall roam around without even a muzzle. A funny world, I decided.

Inside we found Grace sitting at the table with her head down on her hands. She was crying. Tom went into action right away while I stood there laughing at them.

He took Grace in his arms and she finally told him about the burned roast. "I can't understand it!" she said. "I set the stove one way and found the dial changed when I went back! The meat burned to a crisp!"

Tom tried to be fair, but he was tired and he was hungry. He said, "Oh Grace, cut it out! It isn't important. You went away and forgot about the roast and it burned. So what?"

"But I didn't forget about it. The stove is automatic. I set it correctly and somehow it got changed!"

"That's silly. Dials don't turn by themselves."

She really flared up now. "You're telling me I'm lying? That I don't know what I did and what I didn't do? Tom Crandall—I'll have you know—"

"I said forget it! I worked all day and I'm hungry. What have we got for supper?"

That didn't appease her a bit. She turned and flounced out of the room yelling, "Salmon! Canned salmon! It's on the top shelf and the opener is in the drawer. Get your own supper!"

Tom stared after her blankly for a while and then shrugged his shoulders. "Women," he snorted. "Come on, boy. We'll see what we can scrape up."

I don't care much for salmon, but I didn't put up any fuss. I ate it and it wasn't bad because all the time I was thinking how I'd gotten

even with Grace. It was a good feeling.

BUT DURING the night, lying there on that uncomfortable pillow, all my anger came back. Sure—I'd gotten even with Grace, but Tom had had as much to do with it as she. He'd hauled me into the kitchen; and that had really been more humiliating than being pushed off the lounge.

When everything was quiet, I went upstairs with a sudden idea in mind; an idea that was an inspiration. The nursery was right next to the room where Grace and Tom slept, and Grace kept the door ajar so she could hear the brat if he started squalling. I slipped in, quiet as a shadow, and went up to the crib. Junior was sound asleep. I soon put an end to that.

I pushed my nose between the bars of the crib, got the bedding in my teeth, and jerked the little dolt halfway across the mattress. And believe you me—he knew he'd been jerked.

I went out of there like a fast cloud across the moon and was back in the kitchen before the first howl almost brought down the house.

Tom and Grace got up and didn't go back to bed for an hour.

Then I let them get back to sleep and repeated the performance. It was more fun than I'd had in a long time. I woke the brat a third time, but then I quit because I had to get some sleep myself. It is all-important that one watch out for one's health.

I woke up at seven-thirty by the kitchen clock, and all was quiet. I lay there for ten minutes, and the longer it was quiet the happier I got.

It meant that Tom and Grace were oversleeping. Not that I blamed them. They'd spent most of the night trying to figure out what was wrong with the brat.

Finally, at eight o'clock, I went upstairs into their room and looked

them over. They were like dead people. Now I thought of an angle. Might as well get a little credit as long as they'd wake up any minute.

I licked Tom's face until his eyes opened.

He came out of bed as though somebody had run a hat pin up through the mattress and stared wildly at the clock. Grace awoke at the same time and Tom roared.

"You didn't set the alarm!" From his tone he could as well have been yelling, "You just stabbed me through the heart!"

They piled out of bed, Grace red-eyed and groggy. She said, "I thought I set it. I don't know... must have forgotten."

Tom was in the bathroom clawing his razor out of the cabinet. "Forgot! I don't know what's happening around here. Suppose I came home tonight and told you I was fired? If Prince hadn't known something was wrong, we might have slept until noon!"

Grace had pushed her feet into a pair of mules and was struggling into a dressing gown. I was happy to see the frown on her face. Happier yet when she snapped, "Well, suppose I did forget to set the alarm? The baby crying all night. I'm only human." She headed for the stairs and then turned back. "Besides, your arm isn't broken. You know how to set the alarm on a clock. Do I have to take care of everything?"

WHILE NO one was watching, I slipped in and snarled at the baby. That set him off, and merry hell prevailed until Tom went rocketing out the door toward the depot.

But that night, after I'd spent all day waiting for more fireworks, they made up. They had a reconciliation that was the gooiest thing I ever saw. It was enough to turn my stomach, watching them there on the lounge

with their arms wound around each other; necking half the time and spending the other half ogling the baby as though the brat were a prodigy of some sort rather than an oaf who would probably spend three years in the first grade.

While they cemented relations, I lay in front of them with my nose on my paws trying to think up some new angles.

Grace looked down at me and simpered, "Poor Princey! No peace and quiet for our beautiful doggy. But we promise not to have any more fusses; don't we darling?"

Tom goggled at her like a love-sick hippo. It was so disgusting I got up and left the room.

The next fight was staged two weeks later. It happened when Grace washed three of Tom's best shirts and he came home to find her sitting beside the washing machine with a dazed look on her face. She was holding the shirts in her hands, but they weren't shirts anymore. They looked like rags that had been used around a factory to wipe up strong acid.

As Tom came in, Grace burst into tears and held up the rags. "You—your shirts," she wailed.

"My shirts?"

"Your good ones. And all the rest of the wash!"

"What in God's name—"

Tom snatched the rags from her and began looking through the big holes. Then he bent over the washing machine. He came up holding his nose.

"Lye! Lye!" he yelled. "Have you gotten so absent-minded you don't know a box of soap from a box of lye? What's gotten into you, Grace? You don't make sense any more."

"I used soap! Just the way I always do. No lye could possibly have gotten into that wash."

Tom glanced down at the floor of

the utility room, there against the wall. He looked at the three boxes of soap chips and the open lye box beside them.

"But it did get in, and there's only one way it could possibly have happened. You put it in!"

I WAGGED my tail in high glee.

Things were getting hotter and hotter. Of course Grace hadn't put lye in the washing machine. That had been my little contribution to prosperity and good-will. Grace had gone up to look at the baby and had left the top off the washing machine while the clothes settled into the water. Picking up the lye box, dumping some of the stuff in, and putting the box back was the work of but a moment. Priding myself upon speed and accuracy, I didn't spill a crumb and then got upstairs into the nursery almost as fast as Grace herself.

"So I'm an incompetent as well as a liar!" Grace screamed. "I work here all day trying to make a home for you, and when something goes wrong—"

"When something goes wrong? A masterpiece of understatement! Probably a hundred dollars' worth of clothes ruined. Do you know how long it takes me to make a hundred dollars, or do you care? Next time I'll come home and find you've maybe absent-mindedly given the baby a butcher knife to play with instead of a rattle."

I'd never thought of it before, but it was an idea.

Grace reacted differently this time. She stopped crying and stared at Tom, wide-eyed. Then she left the utility room without a word. A minute later we heard the door to her room close and heard the lock click.

Tom rubbed a hand across his forehead like a man with great burdens. I padded up and shoved my nose into

his other hand and whined. That one always got him. He straightened up and sighed.

Then he said, "Come on, boy. We'll see what we can find to eat. This foraging for ourselves is getting to be a habit."

We ate canned salmon again. It wasn't too bad though. I could look back on a good day's work.

The reconciliation was a little different after this one. It was awfully chilly around the house the next morning and there was no goodbye kiss at the door. The process was a gradual thaw-out, until things finally returned to normal.

The next big fight—but why go into detail. It had to do with the baby's getting hold of the bottle of ink Grace had been using to write letters. The baby would crawl around the floor by that time and Grace had left the ink on the table, uncorked.

How the baby got his hands on it remained an unsolved mystery, although I could have solved it for them.

It was funny watching Grace and Tom change right before my eyes; a gradual change, but a definite one. When the bedroom window got opened during a rainstorm one day, thus completely ruining a dressing table and a section of carpet, Tom didn't say a word. He stared coldly at the damage and headed for the corner saloon.

It wasn't just the open window that drove him there. It was that together with a lot of other things, one piled on top of another. As he said to me one day while we were out in the yard: "I can't figure it, Prince. Somehow, I come home every night like a man walking to the gallows. Every time I turn the corner I look to see if the house is still there. Some night, I'm afraid, it won't be."

I nuzzled close, sympathizing with over the final arrangements.
him.

The first time Grace left, Tom went and got her. She came back and it lasted two months. Then—well it's not important as to details, but she went away again. This time he met her somewhere and they talked

TOM WAS home alone when Sam Wilson came to get me. Wilson knew a good dog when he saw one. His eyes lighted up and he said, "We'll be glad to take him, but Tom—what happened—you and Grace...?"

THE NEUROTIC SHRIMP

ORDINARILY WE classify only five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Actually a physiologist could suggest more. For example, we are equipped with a sense of balance which is dependent upon the orientation of a sensitive fluid within the inner ear. We undoubtedly have other faculties just as subtle—perhaps even a "sixth" sense, a sort of clairvoyance.

Among Nature's ingenious designs for equipping animals with sensory organs is a unique system identified with a certain type of ocean shrimp. This sense organ is simply a gravity-detector, a device for enabling the shrimp to know whether it is up or down. It consists of a hollow sack attached to one of the creature's appendages. This sack is lined with sensitive hairs. The shrimp sweeps into the sack a few small grains of sand. These press against the hairs, which are really nerve endings, and tell the animal whether it is floating erect or inverted!

A scientist (motivated not by malice but by pure objective curiosity) decided to try an experiment. He substituted small grains of iron filings for the particles of sand. Immediately the animal became sensitive to magnetic influences, and when a strong magnet was held quite a distance away, the animal used the magnet as its "artificial gravity source", orienting itself with respect to the magnetic field, disregarding totally the existence of gravity. Indeed, for it, gravity didn't exist. The magnetic field of the magnet constituted its world!

The sensory equipment of animals—and men—is good. In fact, it is almost the equal of the most refined laboratory instruments. Just reflect some time on how little light, for example, it takes to make our eyes aware of a light source. The amount is measured in two or three quanta—far better than any instrument can do!

—by Merritt Lynn



TAKE A LOOK AT NOTHING!

THE BOYS who huddle around telescopes under the cold uncomfortable domes of astronomical observatories have pushed telescopic observation just about as far as it will go—at least here on Earth. When Moon observatories become common—that will be another matter.

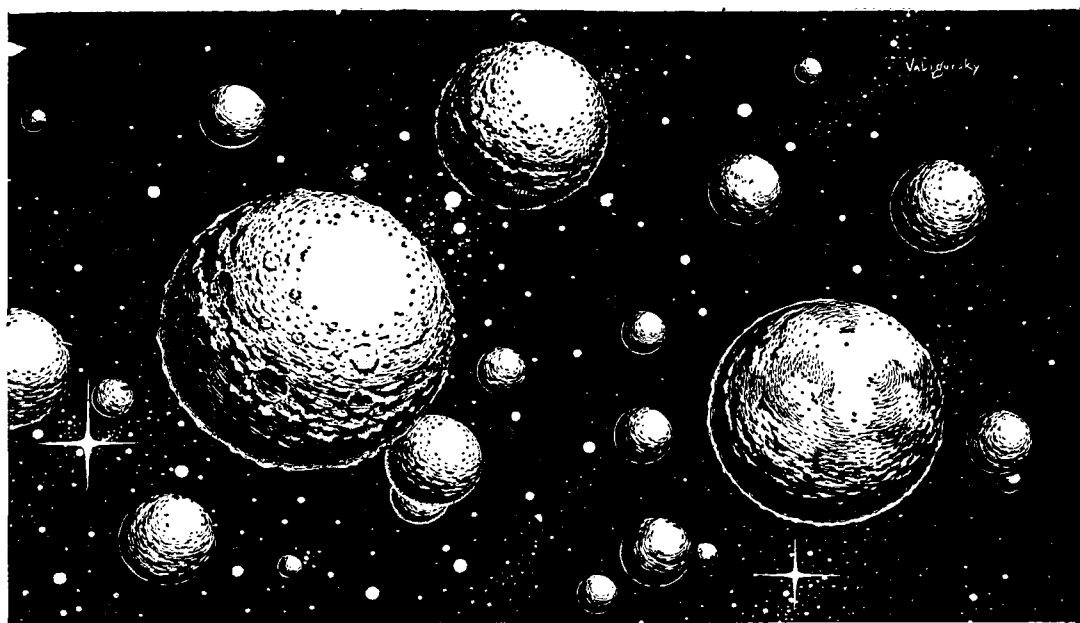
Some French astronomers, working under great handicaps in terms of large optical equipment, have turned to electronics to push the notch up a little higher. They've decided to apply electronic photo-cells to telescopic work. This is not a new idea but, until now, nothing of great worth has been accomplished. The Frenchmen, however, have finally constructed a true electronic telescope in which the sensitive eye or plate has been replaced by a delicate photo-cell pick-up.

Certain materials used in photo-electric cells are extremely light-sensitive. Among these are cesium and potassium. When even minute, hardly detectible quantities of light fall on them, they give off elec-

trons, and it is no trick at all to detect these electrons because physics has already provided the instruments. The astronomers have built very large photo-electric cells. When they are inserted in a moderate-sized telescope and when that telescope is kept following a given portion of the sky hour after hour, enough light is collected from a spot to liberate a quantity of electrons. In essence, a portion of the sky which appears absolutely blank may naturally have stars located in it at fantastic distances and of the faintest intensity. The patient photo-cell, however, accumulates even single quanta of light and the result is that a feeble but detectible current is produced. While this affords no idea of the nature of the stars it picks up, at least the existence of the star at that point is determined—and that's what matters. It is estimated that, using this equipment, astronomers are going to be able to probe far deeper into interstellar space than at present.

—by William Karney

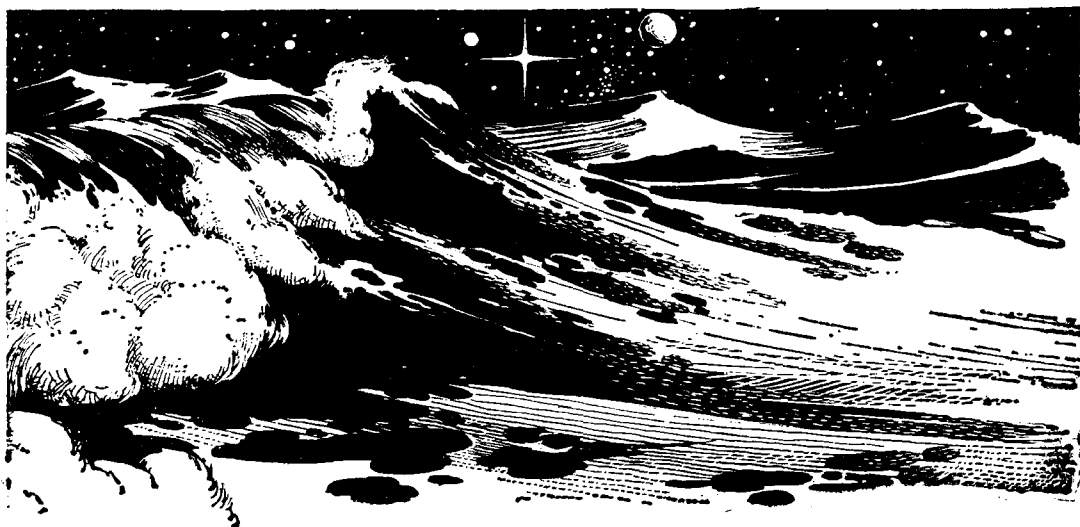




PREFACE

**Here begins the greatest of
all paradoxes: the history
of generations yet unborn —
and of a world yet unknown!**

IT WOULD be futile indeed for one man, in one lifetime, to attempt a history of the universe covering the six hundred years from 1975 to 2575. Well over half a million volumes, microcordings, and audiotapes dealing with various historical phases of this period, are available



for research. So rich in vital material was this period, that the prolific Hubbard Bradford covered only the period from 1900 to 2050 in his twenty-five volume work—*World Crisis and Transition*. The Calais University tapes, the life work of that fiery historian Nicolo Medstein, are titled 2000-2100—*One Hundred Years of Peace*.

Therefore, this history will, of necessity, be far from complete, and will be written to a rigid discipline of elimination. Only phases of vital importance to the complete historical structure will be included. The question of what is vitally important and what is not must, of course, be left to this historian. He may err in judgement many times. And upon completion, this work can be little more than a guide to the vast store of historical knowledge which patiently awaits the student of history.

A work even purporting to be inclusive must be, in a sense, like a boat navigating many channels, because history is not a single broad river. It is a network of streams, broad or narrow only in comparison to each other, winding and twisting toward—but never reaching—the unmoving ocean of finality.

So this historical attempt will touch upon many phases—the economic, the political, the spiritual, and the adventurous, to name but a few. The binding thread of the narrative will, of course, be *people*, because history in its essence is nothing more than a record of the individual and group action upon the cosmic pattern. People make history. Remove them and there is nothing but static soil and empty sky.

There are those who claim all is foreordained; that the human animal is but a pawn through which some master force manifests a pattern. This conviction can be gained only by look-

ing backward at the completed portion of the historical tapestry—never forward.

And in looking backward over the last six hundred years, one feels—uneasily—that this is true; that the entire historical structure was erected toward a definite end: *The coming of a single, colossal personality*. The most complete genius the universe has ever known, or—it would appear—*can* ever know.

The coming of Byron, the poet. Whose birth is of necessity the point toward which and from which history must be written.

Of course, Saul Parnell's name was not Byron and he was not a poet, but for the sake of smooth narrative, we will grant him, even at this point, the name and designation he chose for himself.

But Byron did not come upon the scene until the year 2510, so there are over five hundred years of eventful history to be sifted and weighed in this volume before the stage is set for the man who held the universe in the palm of his hand.

So we strive to ignore him for the time being, even though his gigantic shadow will hang at all times over the thread of the narrative.

CHAPTER I

The Key-Gambit

HISTORY can be likened to a game of chess. It is, however, a game eternal, with no beginning and no end. Thus, the historian of any given period is at a disadvantage, in that he must pick up the narrative of a game already in progress. If he does this arbitrarily, something is lacking in that the pieces on the cosmic chess board were *not* placed there arbitrarily. There is always a reason for their various juxta-

positions. To set the scene for 1975, then, it is necessary to give the reasons why we find the setup as we do. Happily, in this case, we can go back a scant two hundred years and find the key-gambit from which the 1975 arrangement sprang. We have but to set down the beginnings of a phenomenon called the United States of America.

By every rule of formation—by every law of average—this experiment in human expression should have been unsuccessful. The formation of this confederation violated every known law of politics, economics, and historical precedent.

It began as a colony of the reigning empire of the period, Great Britain. The colony consisted of thirteen subdivisions, reaching from the high temperate zones of the land mass upon which it was placed, to the semi-tropical areas to the south. As an expression of resentment to the mother country, these thirteen subdivisions united and declared for sovereign independence from the mother country.

Fortunately, they found the top-heavy empire of Britain just over its cultural and authoritative peak, and independence was won, not from a superhuman effort by the colonies, but from a surprisingly weak effort by Great Britain.

How this thirteen-state confederation ever survived its early years is a classic historic mystery. Yet, it not only survived the founding years, but also a vicious internal schism known as the American Civil War after it had arisen to the status of a world power.

Some of the more starry-eyed historians have attributed its survival and growth to the lofty ideals upon which it was founded. (1)

Two facts are worthy of note, however. One is that the land upon which this nation was founded belonged to someone else—a nomadic type of people who were set upon, slaughtered, and pressed into small areas in order to make room for history's "sublime experiment". And the other is that almost half the land mass of this nation was built up by the forced labor of slaves imported for the purpose from the continent then known as Africa. These slaves were held as personal property after the fashion of meat animals.

But regardless of these original injustices, the individual found great personal freedom in the United States of America. And its economic system of competitive endeavor was a practical one. Prior to the westward adventure mankind had, to a great extent, eaten itself into a bar circle. China had flourished in story-book grandeur, only to degenerate and leave the world nothing but some excellent pottery and a hodge-podge of stoical, underfed millions. Egypt and Rome stalked haughtily across history's stage, and the land was left more barren with the passing of each.

But it was not so with the United States of America. In the first two hundred years of its existence, this more human progress than in all pre-confederation was responsible for previously recorded history. (2)

1 LeRoy Nathan states (*Seeds of Nationalism*, World Press, 2006), "For the first time in recorded history... a people banded together to form a nation on sound tenets. Passages from their constitution echo through the corridors of history: 'The preamble... That all men are created equal... are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...'"

The technical, industrial, and social advancement of this nation in a scant two hundred years is well nigh incredible. Its inventive sons gave the world electricity for illumination and power; a means of verbal communication over distances using wire connections; Americans are credited with the invention of the first guided aircraft, the gasoline engine harnessed to a self-propelling vehicle. (3)

As a result of these and other factors, this nation advanced so rapidly, the balance of the world appeared to go backward. Thus, the United States in the year 1950 found the rest of the world staring, hungry and envious, across its borders.

The American leaders realized no

nation could stand against a desperate world. The only recourse they saw was to buy friends; to attempt the elevation of world standards even at the risk of having its own standards pulled downward.

The world speedily divided itself into two camps; one centered in the United States and the other revolving around a confederation-head on the opposite side of the globe.

With a workable application of atomic fission having come about, the possibilities of military action expanded immeasurably and created a new world condition. (4)

This new condition was one in which a constant state of war existed, but was not recognized as such.

2 Reference is made, of course, to the union of the first forty-eight states of this nation. At the time of the forming of world government, the United States of America included the northern land mass of the continent, formerly a British commonwealth. Also previously independent nations to the south, i. e., Mexico and the Peninsular Federation of smaller states to the south. Several Atlantic and Pacific island groups were also included.

It is of interest that each of these nations and principalities bid individually for admission into the American union. It was during these annexations (1960-71) that the circumstances came about whereby a northern American territory was ceded to the Soviet Republic under circumstances which led to the successful impeachment of an American president.

Roderick Fisher, *A Complete History of the United States* (Bobbs-Merrill, Hays & Crawford, 2003); Max Canton, *The Black Thread* (Redman Gordon & Co., 1973).

3 *The Directory of Industrial Origination* (Pennsylvania Associates, 2061), while a highly technical work in many respects, contains surprising information on this subject. It shows that over eighty per cent of the basic inventions from which our technology springs, came into being in the United States between the years 1810 and 1955.

4 S. M. Ditcher, *A Billion Heads—One Noose* (published by the author in pamphlet form, 1961). This curious brochure is now unobtainable. The only known copy is in the files of Calais University. It is written in a most bombastic style—vehemently worded—but one must concede that the writer gets his point across. He states in part: "You've figured all your life that war is strictly for the soldiers and that the headlines are for you. But you find out all of a sudden that war is for everybody and maybe you'll be under that first bomb, so you walk soft, brother, you walk soft. You see the world squeezed down into the size of a hickory nut, and maybe they'll be sending civilian casualty reports to the boys in the army rather than the other way around. Maybe Jim fighting for his country will get a report and say to his buddy, 'They got my dad in Chicago last week, the rats.' Or, 'I ain't heard from Maizie in a month. I wonder if they bombed New York.' So you walk soft, brother, you walk soft."

"The other side knows it, too, and they don't want a happy, healthy army sitting around with no home to go back to. So both sides take it out by calling each other a bunch of bums—at least for a long time. Anyhow, they walk soft, brother, they walk soft."

Diplomatic relations between combatants were studiously maintained. The world-public, however, recognized the true condition, and the term *cold war* came into common use. This was war under the aforementioned circumstances and conditions. (5)

It may be said in passing that the monetary unit mentioned by Bradford is not to be confused with the present universal credit dollar. (6)

So, as a result of the key-gambit, the formation of the United States of America, and stemming from subsequent developments, we have the position of the chess pieces in the year 1975, with the Sixty Years' War (1914-74) at an end. (7)

We have in the record, prior to that time, a world sick unto death of uncertainty and confusion; a world appalled by the foretastes of possible

5 Bradford has this to say (*World Crisis And Transition*, Vol. II, Temple Photo Press, 2071): "Knowledge concerning the power latent in the atom far preceded workable methods of releasing this power. For many years prior to the first half of the twentieth century, men knew the possibilities lying within the atomic particle.

"It was like knowing of a sleeping giant inside a doorless, windowless room of steel. But how could he be released? And granting the release, how would he react? Would he be a docile servant, or would he smash the world and fling the bits out across free void? Science moved cautiously.

"Then, a succession of events precipitated a situation. With the second phase of the Sixty Years' War pressing upon the United States of America and her allies, the need was felt for a new and devastating weapon. Science was guaranteed unlimited funds and asked to produce a gravity-missile which derived its power from the atomic particle. The bomb was delivered.

"Based upon present-day standards, it was pretty much of a failure. The Americans achieved their ends with it, however, and it presaged the beginning of an era.

"The missile cost two billion dollars."

6 Crad Brayfield (his treatise *Man and Money*, University of Chicago Press, 2314) says: "At this time...each nation had its own monetary unit. This primitive arrangement made for great confusion, the formation of utterly unproductive 'money markets', and the enrichment of speculators. The value of various currencies was of course greater or less in relation to the strongest one in existence—the one in greatest demand. Two of these staple units were—at different times—the British pound and the American dollar."

7 Bradford, *op. cit.*, Vol XIV, states: "The Sixty Years' War was notable in that it was the last military operation between sovereign nations as such. Because of shrinkage in world-size, brought on by more rapid means of travel and communication, nationalism was doomed. Also, the end of national sovereignty was speeded by world-dependence upon the United States of America, and the conviction of American political leaders that only through the establishment of a single world monetary unit could an unbearable national debt be manipulated into nonexistence without loss of honor and public confidence."

8 *Ibid.*, Vol. I. The World Federation was made possible by two prevailing conditions: (1) No nation or group of nations had, at this time, the will to fight. (2) The United States of America remained the dominant world power, desired the Federation, and was in an economic position to buy the necessary support.

Also—and this may be the most important factor of all—the vast majority of the peoples wanted it. This last was not entirely apparent in the beginning. It was revealed when the Federation core stubbornly demanded general elections on the issue in nation after nation—elections free from coercion or terrorism—and won support so broad that other tactics could be used on the minority of recalcitrants. These tactics varied. They consisted of economic boycott—usually the quickest and most effective method; in some cases, of pardons for war criminals previously convicted and imprisoned; of compromise and propaganda which, so far as the historian is concerned, must completely vindicate American statesmanship; a statesmanship so long in disrepute as to be considered impotent.

There was also unpleasantness involved. The short but bloody Arabian Uprisings, and the starvation of ten thousand Chileans, put both a red and a black blot on the founding of the Federation. While these two incidents cannot be condoned, it is no doubt necessary to view them, in the broad sense, as the birth pains of a new order. And taken all in all, the birth was remarkably painless.

complete annihilation as given them in the sixth decade of that century; (8) a world populace ready for something—anything—which promised a clearing-away of the eternal fear. We have probably the first moment in history when a leadership—however powerful, however determined—could bring about an amalgamation such as the one contemplated. A world union in which no boundaries would be patrolled; a federation in which all would be included; a single government; a world Federation.

The first meeting of the World Council was held during the month of July, 1982, in New Amsterdam. A World Constitution was ratified, defining the rights of the states and the rights of the Federal Government.

As with many momentous and precarious operations, the proposition came within a hair's-breadth of falling completely to pieces at its culmination. As a result of bitter Central-European resistance, the single-presidency clause was abandoned in favor of a three-man unit with no nation entitled to more than one representative in the presidency.

Also, a compromise was worked out with the South American bloc whereby the newly formed World-Bank, in exchanging national currencies for the world-unit, also granted loans on the basis of proven state need.

The office of Commander of World Police caused the greatest amount of worry. It was foreseen that this could be the springboard for a potential world dictator. It was decided the position would be filled by a vote of the entire Council rather than—as originally suggested—by presidential appointment. The term was set for two years, with no Commander allowed to succeed himself.

The meeting lasted three months and was fraught, a great deal of the time, with jealousy, suspicion, and bit-

terness. It is interesting to note, therefore, that all differences must have been settled with mutual satisfaction, because of the designation of Denver, Colorado, as the world-capitol. The American delegation and their supporters had suggested Denver early in the meeting. But so great and harsh were the objections that the Americans withdrew on the point. At the close of the meeting, however, the name was put forward by the Arabian delegation, who had every reason to hate the Americans bitterly, and Denver was selected by unanimous vote.

The delegates went home in a mutually excellent frame of mind.

CHAPTER II

Science Unfettered

DURING the thirty years between 1950 and 1980, constructive scientific research languished. This was, in reality, a period of culmination. Mankind had finally discovered the means with which to blow himself to bits. The question uppermost in his mind was—will it happen, or will it not? Living became a continual state of tension. The mass hysterias of 1954-55 were the direct results of this brutal uncertainty. The periods of fainting, of threats and counter-threats between the nation-groups opposing each other in the fifties and sixties of that century, was far harder on the nerves than had been the declared wars of previous times.

Scientifically, this time was spent in devising new methods of destruction. That but one or two of these methods were used—and these with marked timidity—was indeed fortunate. Germ warfare would have depopulated the earth far more efficiently than the hydro-plutonium charge, a single unit of which was used in

2007 to blow a two-mile-wide strip out of the Isthmus of Panama from ocean to ocean.

Had Norvel's famous Five Quarts of Poison ever been poured into the Atlantic Ocean, every drop of water—fresh or salt—upon the earth or over the earth would have become a deadly potion within two weeks.

Many editorialists of the time interpreted this reluctance to use weapons of disastrous possibilities as an indication that mankind was making progress along humanitarian lines. (9) This attitude was probably all to the good, as it no doubt helped lay the groundwork for world federation.

It is claimed that a scientist named Mather developed, during this period, a process for releasing atomic power directly from common substances. However, if he did, little note was taken of it. Rocket development and research was at a feverish pitch, and the problems were not those of propulsion. Several practical methods of atomic drive had been devised, and research was directed along the lines of control.

In 1961, a group headed by William Barslow sent a guided rocket around the earth in six minutes. Four years elapsed before the time was cut

to seven seconds.

One wonders at this point if *pure scientific research* was not truly involved, even in the face of possible annihilation by the enemy? Seven minutes or seven seconds? What was the difference for their avowed purpose? One is able to imagine a twentieth-century scientist saying to himself: "I believe this can be done in a matter of seconds rather than minutes. And I think I can find out before someone kills me."

After 1980, a change was brought about in the processes of scientific investigation. One hundred years—and more—before that time, invention and research were carried on, to a great extent, by individuals such as Edison, Ford, DeForest, Steinmetz, who may or may not have worked under benefit of grants from wealthy patrons.

As time went on, however, industrial giants came into being. The American Telephone and Telegraph Company. The General Electric Company. The DuPont Chemical empire. These fabulous corporations, and others like them, set aside vast amounts for research in their respective fields. They canvassed the colleges and universities for the most promising young men and women.

9 Nicolo Medstein (2000-2100—*One Hundred Years of Peace*, on the Calais University tapes) says: "The prattlings of the Utopian thinkers are indeed nauseating to anyone able to count beyond fifteen. I am inclined to groan upon being told that man has at last developed a set of glowing spiritual intestines; that war, conquest, aggression in all forms, have come to be regarded as quaint, barbaric, and outmoded customs; that modern man will never again have anything to do with war.

"This last may be true, but why the hypocrisy? Certainly modern man may well have nothing to do with war, but not because his guts gleam with spiritual light. As a matter of cold fact, he is scared stiff of it. He got scared the day it walked right up and leered in his own front window, and he's been scared of it ever since.

"Prior to the atomic developments, war was a comparatively safe venture in respect to the majority of humans concerned. Those away from the battlefields never got hurt. And, oddly enough, the chief instigators of these blood-fests were inclined to stay safely at home and occupy themselves with sending words of encouragement to the boys at the front.

"Then the setup changed. The "front" of any war became an area bounded by the north and south poles. Thus, we had a situation whereby the instigators themselves could be forced to back up their own skins. The fashion of warfare bid strongly to become a process of smashing from the top down, instead of from the bottom up.

"Immediately someone saw the spiritual light. I wonder who..."

And talented young people gravitated naturally toward positions where money was no object—where equipment and salaries were most attractive. But of course they worked for the corporations, not themselves, and individuality in science and invention were lost.

The first successful atom bomb was devised under an unlimited government grant, and there was no individuality whatsoever involved. Upon its completion and use, not one person in a hundred thousand knew the names of the men responsible.

After 1980, however, arrangements were made whereby individuals of a certain proven talent could draw grants from the World Bank. (10) Thus, individual scientists became known and got public credit for their work.

As the public became more vitally

interested in scientific research, geniuses arose to be called by their true names rather than the name of a corporation. Spanier, whose brilliant research into cold light opened the way for other men waiting for his discoveries. The brilliant and erratic Lombardi, deathless in the field of communication. (11) Packard, the builder of space craft. Robert Dante, the brilliant physicist whose brutal murder remains an eternal indictment of mankind. Loring, Steelman, Schwab—all shaping the world for the coming Byron—not due for four hundred years.

* • *

EDITOR'S NOTE: The next chapter of the history tells of Robert Dante's disgraceful death. The panic that grips the world and makes "science" a fighting word. Bewildered millions refusing the offer of a new Eden.

10 The World Bank mentioned here is not to be confused with the earlier institution bearing the same name which was originated during the first half of the twentieth century, and dissolved in 1962 at the same time that a confederation termed the United Nations as useless.

11 An interesting sidelight on Lombardi was that he claimed to be a descendant of one Marconi of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Marconi has been given credit, by some historians, for devising the first means of wireless communication. Certain records throw grave doubt upon this claim. There is no positive proof in either direction, however.



THIS BABY'S GOT BRAINS!

By Sandy Miller

THE FAMILIAR cyclotron is one of the oldest tools used in modern atomic research. When Dr. Lawrence invented it about fifteen years or so ago, he put into the hands of atomic physicists a device of incredible power, enabling them to penetrate to the heart of the atom. The basic simplicity of the cyclotron has lent itself to a dozen modifications, all sorts of "trons" which have pushed the frontiers of physics farther ahead. The cyclotron, though, along with that vitally useful instrument, the Van DeGraff generator, remains one of the basic atom-smashing gadgets.

Primarily, it's a radio transmitter and a magnet, so blended together as to take deuterons or other charged particles, and

by whirling them through an ever-expanding spiral in a powerful magnetic field, giving them tremendous energies which enable them to penetrate to the core of the atom. The details of building such a device aren't exactly for the amateur.

A young seventeen-year-old high-school student with boundless curiosity, an inexhaustible supply of energy, and a penchant for scientific activity has just succeeded in constructing a small cyclotron, perfect in every detail! He got the details from scientific journals and from direct correspondence with Dr. Lawrence himself. Then he went ahead with the tough, messy job of winding his own coils, stacking his own magnets, and constructing his own short-

wave transmitter. The resulting instrument works like a charm and can provide various sorts of radioactive materials and isotopes for research. It will be used at the high school as a demonstration and experimental tool. Needless to say, the inventor, Robert E. Simpson, is going on to become another atomic physicist. With his capabilities, he shouldn't have far to go! It isn't too often that a student under-

takes such an ambitious project, but on the other hand, there are a surprising number of experimentors who will tackle just about anything, especially if they have the slightest access to information. Someday, it is almost a certainty, you will read about some industrious amateur who has tried his hand at an atomic pile—and what's more, the effort is certain to be a success. Americans are like that!

The Ecological Flea

By Ralph Cox

ECOLOGY IS the science which studies the nice balance between living things and their environment. Nature in its ponderous way tips the balance one way and compensates for it another. But always there is the balance. It has been so since the beginning of time. The fly in the ointment is Man, who with his inconceivably clever technology, interrupts this ecological balance between living things and their nonreplaceable substances like iron ore and insect depredations and the exhaustion of natural resources.

Nature, however, takes only so much abuse and then comes back fighting. Will Man heedlessly and indiscriminately drain off the water plateau? All right, then Nature will refuse to replenish it, and vast areas will become arid. Will Man dump huge volumes of sulfuric acid into the rivers and lakes? Then Nature will retort by killing off the game fish.

This latter instance, while relatively minor, illustrates the ecological balance as

well as anything. While the acid poured into the streams from busy industries may be too dilute to kill the natural game fish directly, their source of food, the minute water flea and a host of other insect things, cannot stand it and gradually die off. The fish then perish for want of food.

If this were the only result of indiscriminate handling of natural resources, it wouldn't be so bad, but the principles extend from forests through living things to nonreplaceable substances like iron ore and oil. Fortunately, so long as men do not interfere with their basic food supplies, their ecological balance is not too badly hurt, for they compensate for any deviation with an incredible technology. When the iron is finally gone, the time will become the Age of Titanium or the Age of Magnesium, or whatever metal it may be. It is possible, though, that some day it may be necessary to seek the other planets simply for men to live—the Earth by that time having become an exhausted shell....



UNFORTUNATELY, in spite of the marvelous progress made in rocketry and high-altitude flights, a strong note of momentary pessimism must enter in. We are still on the bottom of the sea of air which rests overhead.

The highest altitude reached by a human being was seventeen miles. Not seventy, but *seventeen*.

It's a sad state of affairs indeed when, in spite of two-hundred-and-fifty-mile two-stage rockets, men still have climbed into the atmosphere a mere seventeen miles. The satellite station and the Moon flight seem mighty far away after a report like that.

And yet the flight was not without its glory. The pilot flew one of the experimental rocket ships carried to a twenty-thousand-foot altitude by a B-29 bomber.

He was launched from that altitude and then he opened up the rocket motors and climbed at an angle of about fifty degrees at a speed of more than a thousand miles an hour. At seventeen miles, his short-lived rocket motors had, for the most part, exhausted their fuel and he came down in a wide glide, landing at two hundred miles an hour.

That was faster and higher than any human being had ever flown before—and it was done in a manned, winged rocket. It is a far cry from what must come. It is like the first step of a baby—and yet it is progress, that's undeniable. The accomplishments are as yet small, but they are a beginning, and great things will come from them—but please, let's get more altitude than a mere seventeen miles!

—by Jack Winter



THE CLUB HOUSE

By Reg Phillips

SGT. EDWIN CORLEY of the 3860th Comp. Gp., Gunther AFB, Alabama, has written me a letter saying that what I wrote about the ants was interesting. "While we're on the subject," he says, "what about the salmon? How do they know when and where to go to the spawning grounds?" He also asks about seals. How can they navigate to a small island that a human navigator would need instruments to find?

He just mentions the two, but many others could be mentioned: the homing pigeon, the swallows of Capistrano Mission, certain types of butterflies, and so on.

Humans have a habit of naming something and then thinking they understand it. We have a term, *instinct*, which covers anything other creatures do that we don't understand. It's instinct that sends the salmon into the river where it was born, and up against all odds to the spawning grounds. It's instinct that enables the seal to cross a vast expanse of ocean and come unerringly to the small island at a definite day of the year.

But what instinct is exactly, we don't know. I've read a theory somewhere that the salmon never leaves that river. Salt water and fresh don't mix very fast. A river reaches the ocean and flows into it, and keeps on flowing. In a few hundred miles it may mix so much that it becomes lost. The salmon never leaves the channel it maintains in the ocean, and when spawning season comes it merely follows the river from hundreds of miles

out right to the land mouth, and upstream. If I remember correctly, it was somewhat proved by planting marked salmon in other streams. They came back to the streams where they had been planted, not to the ones where they had been born.

Once again we have explained why it happens, and this time we've merely substituted an explanation for a word. It sounds more intelligent, but it isn't.

What makes a bird build a nest like the one it was born in? Instinct. What makes a dog turn around several times before lying down? Instinct carried over from its ancestors, who lived in prairies and had to break down the grass in order to lie down.

Instincts may be roughly divided into two types: behavior patterns, such as building a nest in a certain way, etc., and navigational, which enable a creature to go somewhere unerringly by seemingly mysterious means.

Now we come to why I bothered to write about this subject at all. I wonder if there is such a thing as instinct? Sometimes I think there isn't.

Let's put the thing on an imaginative cosmic scale. Let's suppose that there are beings that live for countless billions of years, and travel all over the cosmos. They observe stars that have planets. They observe the planets change. Oceans come. The spectrum lines of chlorophyll appear. At a regular time strange geometrical growths can be seen. They are cities, but these cosmic creatures don't know that. Finally, metallic things fly along

above the surface. Now and then some part of the globe breaks out in a rash of small explosions, while germ-like things rush at one another in huge waves. Then—boom. The planet explodes; its pieces going every which way.

They evolve a theory about a strange cosmic virus that attacks a planet and then develops to the seeding stage, at which time the planet bursts like a pod, spreading the seeds to infect other planets.

But the truth they don't get at is that in each case life may have originated independently. Eventually an intelligent race appeared. Finally that intelligent race discovered atom fission and played around with it until it tried the fatal experiment that was to destroy the planet.

This cosmic race calls it the instinctive growth of planet life. Since it occurs at regular rates on all planets of a certain type, they don't consider that it might be anything but instinctive.

Yet I doubt that any of you would call the thought processes that preceded the making of an atom bomb *instinct*. Would you call the invention of calculus instinct? Or the invention of the airplane?

We could probably get closer to an understanding of instinct if we looked on all creatures as I did those ants a couple of months ago. As thinking creatures equipped with certain faculties and abilities, and having certain practical purposes they desire to accomplish. A salmon nearing the spawning season may have a vitamin deficiency, or some other deficiency. In other words, a hunger of a kind peculiar to that period. As the hunger develops, the fish smells the food it craves and follows the smell through the ocean to the river, and up the river, never reaching the food it's

after, and being caught up by egg laying when it gets as far as it can go after this food. I'm not asserting that as a serious explanation, but merely as an example of looking at instinct from a sensible angle. Those salmon that don't develop the peculiar hunger would naturally not go up the river, but lay their eggs in ocean silt where they wouldn't hatch. How many of them do that? No one has thought to find out, and probably couldn't if he tried! It's only the ones that go up the stream that we know about.

And what about the birds that build their nests a certain way? I doubt that very much of it is unexplainable. A certain bird is afraid of certain special things. It incorporates its fears into its plans. Because of its size and feeding habits, a certain type of location suits it better than others, so it picks that type of spot, and all its species comes up with the same answer except for a few stupid ones who don't. Maybe it doesn't know it's going to lay eggs and have young. Maybe it's nervous, or wants to keep its mate busy doing something, or wants to make something it can feel safe in at night. Practical motivations, practical solutions, or at least typical of the personality and abilities of the individual bird, and therefore somewhat of the species. Maybe the eggs come quite by surprise. The bird is puzzled about them, not quite sure what they are. It may be weak from having laid them, and want to rest. Things go on from there.

Sure, I've seen hens that wanted to set on eggs, and not because they felt weak. How much of it was because they were grown enough and had had experience enough to know what they were doing?

The point I'm trying to make is a dual one. I think much could be discovered by making an approach to

instincts from the psychological angle. The angle of a typical creature-faced with a typical set of external and internal problems, and answering them in a way typical to its makeup and habits.

As for migratory instincts, maybe the day will come when the study of infrared radiations and their sources can throw a little light on the subject. Homing pigeons get confused near radio broadcasting towers....

* * *

There were a lot of letters this month. One asks if it's necessary to put out a fanzine if you start a stf club. The answer to that is that some of the largest clubs don't bother with a fanzine, and also some of the largest are formed just to put out one. There are no rules for anything in stf fandom. It depends on what you and your friends want to do. Nothing else. I know of clubs that were brought into existence by the common interest of stf which now seldom bother to bring up the subject, having become more interested in other things they have in common, such as chess, opera, etc.

There were quite a few letters concerning *Fanvariety*, ranging from the "give those lewd blanks h blank, Rog," to the more normal. "I'd like to subscribe if I can get the address, because I'm sure those boys now realize there's limits, and they have the stuff in them to put out the best stf fanzine on the market". To which I agree. There's a review of *Fanvariety* coming up this time.

And there's a letter of a type I like to get. It's from a new fan who tells me what fanzines he's tried and which he's liked and sent in a subscription for. He's Charles H. Stinson, Box 327, Colfax, Wn. His favorite so far is *Peon*. Why don't

some of you fan editors send him a sample copy?

Then there is a type of letter I don't like. It says, among other things, "Your reviews often make or break a zine. You've got a lot of power in your typer". I don't think that's true and I hope it isn't true. The last thing I would want is the power to make or break anything, or even to exert any power of any kind in fandom, except the power of influence toward a healthy norm in fan publishing, and the power of influencing against extremism. But actually there's very little need of exerting either of those influences, so my primary power is and will always remain that of introducing fans and heretofore non-fans into the fun of fan literature and fan get-togethers. When I succeed in that I'm happy. Okay?

* * *

Now we come to the fanzine reviews. I'll start off this time with:

FANVARIETY: no. 13; 15c; W. Max Keasler, Box 24, Washington U., St. Louis 5, Mo. Coedited by Bill Venable with assistants Marie Louise, and Mrs. Nancy Gerding. To tell you what's happening here I'll quote from Max's editorial. "There are big plans ahead for *Fanvariety*. Bill and I got our heads together via a 3c stamp, and here is what we swamp folks come up with. We're dropping *Fanvariety* and forming ENTERPRISES. Under it we'll both print our own zine. You'll receive both mags until your sub runs out." They'll keep the name *Fanvariety* Publications, however. And with Max going to college it sounds like a good arrangement.

This current and last issue of *Fv* proper is as nice a zine as you can find. It's impossible to pick out a best in the issue. "A Pound of Flesh" by Bill Venable brings out the truth that a person who is prej-

udiced against something is generally quite ignorant of that subject. He's discussing fan publishing and also opinions of stf on college campuses. Lemuel Craig writes something under the title "Is Einstein Greater Than Ackerman?", which he immediately confesses has nothing to do with his subject but was used merely to make you start reading. Trapped!

Andy Gregg writes one of the best one-page stories I've ever read, "The Man in Black". And the cover by Ronald Clyne must have been inspired by "Danse Macabre" to capture that mood so wonderfully. I've written a couple of stories while playing that piece over and over. It has the power to *reach* into dark corners.

* * *

NEWSSCOPE: 5c; Lawrence R. Campbell, 43 Tremont St., Malden 48, Mass. He signs himself Larry. I guess that would be the nickname for Lawrence, though I've never thought of it before.

Larry sends three things for review this time, and a letter explaining them. First there's the newszine; second, a copy of a news-letter distributed to his contributors, which is something I've never heard of before—and a very good idea. Gives them something extra for their cooperation. Third, a copy of the New England Fantasy Newsletter. He says, "This is important. We in New England are trying to organize, and through this organ we will let fandom know what we are accomplishing. Limited number of copies available for 2c stamp. No subscription price. All you New England fans should write to Larry and get in on this. There are a lot of you and you can become an organized group. Larry's your workhorse...."

Now for *Newsscope* itself. Nos. 13 and 14 are on hand. I don't know how Larry does it. In a few short months he's climbed right up there with James Taurasi and Bob Tucker in news coverage, readability, and perspective. And for only a nickel a copy! In No. 12 he reports on the

sale of *Galaxy*, new developments anent Asf and its dianetics lion-by-the-tail, and the new magazine to be edited by Paul Fairman. It also reports on fanzines, radio, fan clubs, and everything of interest to fans in general. In No. 14, for October, it reports on *Startling's* going monthly, among other things.

* * *

SLANT: one issue for one issue of a recent US promag such as this copy of *Amazing Stories* you are reading right now; Walter Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Rd., Belfast, Ireland. This fanzine has five-by-seven-inch pages, is printed, and has sixty pages. There's a four-color cover on it, too! And some of the interior illos have colors. The make-up is really something, and that's why I mentioned it. A monumental amount of work went into printing it. And look at the names on the contents page: Manly Banister, A. Bertram Chandler, Eric Frank Russell. With names like that you can be sure of your money's worth. Manly's story, "A Matter of Talents", is in first place.

But, though all the stories are great, the thing I liked best was twenty lines that had to be filled in with something, so Walt filled them in with some chit-chat about printing. Don't know whether he was serious. He says the unit of ink is a smidgin, which is three nyimfs, and five smidgins make one dirty great dollop. And he says the British Standard Smidgin can be inspected at his printing shop, Slant House. He also says he learned his printing by doing things before he learned they were impossible—such as using a cork backing for the make-ready.

You'll enjoy this zine, and all it costs is the postage to send a prozine to its editor in Ireland.

* * *

QUANDRY: 15c; Lee Hoffman, 101 Wagner St., Savannah, Ga. Lee asks me to say that back issues are not available. Only the issue current at the time you send your fifteen cents. A second request she makes is

that I announce she's planning to put out a checklist of fan publications in 1952. She would like to trade zines with other fan publishers for this purpose, and any of you fan eds who don't want to (I can't imagine that!), will you please send her details for your zine on a postal card so she can make her checklist complete?

Now for this issue, No. 15, Nov. 1951. A title that caught my eye is on page 16— "A Critique of Pure Fanzines", by Bill Venable. It's a discussion of stories sent to fanzines that have to be rejected. The primary cause for rejects by fan eds is that the stuff is too juvenile in its style.

The title, of course, is a take-off on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which he expounds the belief, to state it roughly, that nothing can be known except through experience. He's famous because up to that time it was fondly believed that the arm-chair philosopher could by pure reason alone arrive at the Truth concerning All. More about the Nolacon doings, which are quite interesting.

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y. Two issues on hand for review. Without any fanfare F-T has changed its format. It's no longer a mimeographed fanzine. Instead, the same contents are reduced and printed by photo-offset. Taurasi is in contact with all or most of the pro editors and also the book publishers, so that he can bring you the news before it happens in those fields. In addition he has correspondents that supply him with news of interest to fans. He brings out his newsheet twice a month, too.

A companion zine of F-T is Fan-Vet, published monthly and for fans in the armed services only. The fan-vet organization is doing a valuable service in supplying promags and books for overseas fans.

* * *

JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT:

no price listed. Send for a sample copy and the details of membership in the Chicago Rocket Society. It holds meetings once a month in Roosevelt College. The Journal is their official publication. A page or two is devoted to details of the meetings. The rest is taken up by serious scientific articles on various phases of 'spaceflight, rocketry, and analyses of conditions that will be met on other planets. Most valuable regular feature is "Rocket Abstracts", which gives brief quotes from current technical publications. Ralph Hagedorn discusses the terminology of spaceflight.

Also sent this time is a thick volume, "Collected Technical Reports", volume II. It sells for a dollar and a quarter, and is worth it, in my opinion. Here are hours of carefully written articles on all phases of space travel. Seventy-three pages.

* * *

PEON: 15c; copies free upon request; Charles Lee Riddle, PN1, USN, Fleet All Weather Training Unit, Pacific, c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, Calif. All that means that he's stationed at Hawaii with his family there with him. His hobby is his fanzine, and it's one you'll enjoy.

This issue contains a discussion by T. E. Watkins of a book, "The Nature of the Universe", by Fred Hoyle (Harper Bros. \$2.50) which presents a new theory on the nature of things. From Watkins' discussion of it this theory seems to be that everything is made from hydrogen, and hydrogen is spontaneously "created", so that creation is still going on. The only sensible thing I can see in it is the theory that the universe has always existed and always will. I think that myself. Since time is relative, if the universe had an origin, that origin could have been yesterday as well as billions of years ago—both dates manifestly absurd to me. If you postulate it began with the explosion of a ball that contained all matter, where did that ball exist and how did it come into existence? As for the rest, it would be

necessary to see the book itself to learn what it says.

Peon is starting a new series, fanzine classics, which will be reprints of stuff considered to be the best that appeared in fanzines of yesteryear.

* * *

WOOMERA: 20c; Nick Solntseff, 184 Girraween Road, Girraween, N. S. W., Australia. A nice little fanzine from down under. Six items on the contents page. "A survey of fan affairs" gives a report on fan activities in Sydney. They're planning a first Australian Convention for 1952. Help support them by sending for a copy.

* * *

WONDER: 40c per year; quarterly; Michael Tealby, 8 Burfield Ave., Loughborough, Leics., England. Beginning with this issue, Mr. Tealby is devoting his fanzine to an investigation of the Shaver Mystery, with the aim of either proving or disproving it. This issue contains a very complete and intelligently written resume of the whole history of the mystery. Those of you who are interested should subscribe at once and ask for the summer 1951 issue. You may also subscribe by sending Mr. Tealby a copy of *Amazing Stories* or some other prozine.

* * *

RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST: 25c; Don Fabun, 2524 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley 4, California. Published by the Elves, Gnomes, and Little Men's Stf, Chowder and Marching Society, which is also a good description of the zine. It's well put out and always interesting, with plenty of good reading and thought-provoking stuff in it.

The cliché in stf is discussed by Leland Sapiro, who makes me wonder when he gets through if there is anything imaginable that isn't a cliché. However, I suspect he wants reactions from his readers.

"On the Newsstands" by Jan Ro-

manoff comments on the various prozines on the stands, always from the basic premise that the fiction is terrible, it seems. However, his comments are terse and to the point, and worth reading if you want to pick out your reading rather than buy indiscriminately.

The articles and stories are good. You'll like it.

* * *

COSMIC: a first issue: 10c; Joseph Semenovich, 40-14 10th St., L.I.C. 1, N.Y. "Published for the fun of it," which should be the reason for all fan publishing. Three stories and four articles.

Joe had trouble with a leaky mimeo, he says. My copy was okay, and I enjoyed reading it. Best in the issue was "The Ultimate Consequence", by N. Hirschhorn, which was definitely good. Good luck to you, Joe, and I hope you get enough subs to help you get your mimeo in shape.

* * *

SCIENCE AND CULTURE MAGAZINE: 15c; Stanley Crouch, Holly Circle, Sterling, Va. In a letter accompanying this zine Stan says it isn't strictly a fanzine, but more for the person interested in the serious side of science and culture. After reading it I think it's a nice zine. Its articles are all interesting.

* * *

IT: 15c; Bob Chambers, 990 N. 10th, Coos Bay, Oregon. Published quarterly. A couple of things by David H. Keller appear in this issue, which is issue number two. Four nice stories altogether, and plenty of articles. "Paper Personalities", a story by the editor himself, is quite good, though I spoiled it for myself by thinking of something wonderful. Space travel will always be possible. Why? Because once you get out there you'll go to sleep. After all, space is full of nothing but ether.... There are sixty pages to IT. Some of the contents are double-spaced

which makes for easy reading but adds to the cost of publishing. You get more than your money's worth, anyway. Some good fan art, too.

* * *

SHADOWLAND: 10c; Sam Martinez, P.O. Box 2032, Tulsa, Okla. The artwork by Rotsler is worth the dime alone. The contents are short stories, poems, and articles. Sam says in his editorial, "A little of anything and everything is liable to creep in". The thing I liked most this issue was the cartoon drawings of the editorial staff of the zine. A nice bunch. And getting a fanzine is like getting a long letter from a friend when the guys and gals that put it out are friendly.

Try it and see if you don't like it.

* * *

BEWARE: No. 2; 10c; quarterly; Ken Beal, 115 E. Mosholu Pkwy., Bronx 67, N.Y. David Stone and Ken have the two stories in this issue. Ray Clancy has a poem. Some good fan artwork ornaments the pages. These boys belong to a fan writing group in New York. When Mari and I lived in Flushing we had them out one evening. They are interesting and likeable, and you'll like their fanzine.

* * *

SOL II: a drill press publication; Dave Ish, 914 Hammond Road, Ridgewood, N.J. Oh yes, 10c. Dave confesses he's fourteen years old. He puts out a darn good fanzine—and why not? I was intelligent at fourteen myself. I think that's the age when I.Q. is at its peak.

Gerry de la Ree has an interesting bit of fiction, "From The Mountain." And Dave had a lot of fun printing his fanzine on paper of different colors, which always makes a zine interesting. Send for a copy. You'll enjoy it. And I'm sure Dave wants to make a lot of friends and enter into fan activities. Give him a welcome he'll never forget.

* * *

FANTASY-TRAILS: bi-monthly, 10c; Andre Von Bell, 2221 Parkway Drive, Winston-Salem, N.C. An adzine, and there are some real bargains advertised in this issue. This is a second issue. It will take time to build up circulation, but Andre seems able to do it. He wants good material to fill in his zine. In other words, he's just starting, like all of you did once. Give him a welcome, too!

* * *

BIZARRE: I'll bet that makes you old timers jump. But it isn't a revival of that zine. This is the January 1941 issue. A real old-timer! And Don Ford, 129 Maple Ave., Sharonville, Ohio, has a few copies for sale. They're a dollar apiece. Too much? Not to collectors. It was printed by Bill Hamling when he was a fan. Cover by Hannes Bok with interiors by Bok and Marconette. There's the ending of A. Merrit's "Dwellers in the Mirage" that didn't appear anywhere else, the original appearance for the first time of Lovecraft's "The Thing in the Moonlight", and an article by John W. Campbell, Jr., "To Write—Be Wrong!"

Drool, you collectors, and even you non-collectors will find it worth a buck to see this ghost from the past. There aren't many copies, so if you want one you'd better send for it at once.

* * *

That seems to be all for this time. Except that while I've reviewed the fanzines I've been thinking some more about salmon and allied creatures. The one thing that I feel sure of is that, whatever their reason for going back up the river to the pool they were born in, it definitely isn't with any idea of spawning. That would predicate an understanding of the life process far beyond their experience, even if they were intelligent. In ex-

periments. where they have been hatched in artificial pools connected to streams, and marked, they have returned to those artificial pools, which points toward memory of the location more than to odors, though odors or tastes in the water may guide them most of the way. Other fish have been proved to have remarkable memory of underwater terrain, and probably the salmon has that, too. But it's the motive for returning to the place of birth

that fascinates me. It isn't some strange thing called instinct, but is rather some cause that triggers when the season is right.

If we could develop techniques for understanding the salmon and the Swallows of Capistrano and a few other creatures native to our planet those techniques could come in handy when we land on Mars.

ROG PHILLIPS

the GOLDEN GODS

by
JOHN
BLOODSTONE

(concluded from page 59)

such a triumph when I did it, and so easy, that I laughed out loud. I was a robot, and I was laughing. The Ser-in Ni and the Djar Li priests thought at first that the Secret God had killed me and gone beserk.

"After spending two days trying to find a way out of the time-chamber, I took over the ship. I knew who was piloting the other now. It was no Secret God. It was Nr'im Kun'ri. Amateur that he was, I soon overcame him. The other robot I found intact, of course.

"So Gra'ghr is free. Your brother sits on the planetary throne at Rurz'tlid, and to back him up I have given him the other ship and shown him how to operate it and its armaments. He told me you had gone to Zi'lgarlon and I came to find you. To think, beloved, that we can live together forever and use this ship to comb this universe of yours in search of adven-

ture. And perhaps, someday, we can discover a way of discarding synthetic life for reality. I've already gone into space, far beyond the four suns, and have discovered that we were surrounded by a nebula. Beyond lie the numberless stars. Look!"

He pointed to a viewplate on the wall, and for the first time in her life she beheld the glittering universe—the secret universe that lay within the Lens.

"But Gurund!" she protested. "What have you done with the other golden robot?"

"Didn't you know?" he said. "Come I'll show you!"

He took her by the hand and pointed at the viewplate. It was the exact twin of the other—and it took her several moments to realize that she was looking at a mirror....

THE END

SAM MERWIN'S



BOOKCASE

NEW TALES OF SPACE AND TIME, edited by Raymond J. Healy, Henry Holt & Co., New York City (\$3.50).

Mr. Healy has managed to come up with what is to us a new approach to the currently-glutted field of science fiction anthologies. Instead of culling the same yellowed pulp magazine pages that have been culled too often for the purpose of reprinting the same few-score stories that have for some years now made sf anthologies repetitious to the screaming point, Mr. Healy has managed to get eleven well-established authors in the field to contribute new, or at least hitherto unpublished, material. On the whole, the results have been not only novel but highly salubrious.

Beginning, perhaps inevitably, with Ray Bradbury, and continuing through a list that includes such stalwarts as Isaac Asimov, Kris Neville, Cleve Cartmill, A. E. van Vogt and Anthony Boucher, Mr. Healy has included works by such less regular sf authors as Frank Fenton and Joseph Petracca, R. Bretnor and the celebrated Gerald Heard. More, he has even persuaded P. Schuyler Miller to emerge from a too-long fictional retirement with a time-travel epic that ingeniously italicizes the well-learned lessons of the drama *Berkeley Square*—to wit, that most of us must inevitably be wretched in any time but our own.

For the rest, we especially liked Bradbury's tale of interplanetary travel, *Here There Be Tygers*; Kris Neville's *Bettyann*, a finely-wrought story of a little alien-child trapped in a human body on our planet; and R. Bretnor's *Little Anton*, in which the bawdy adventures of "natural" scientific genius Papa Schimmelhorn are continued with Papa meeting a nephew who is almost too much for him. Heard, of course, has come up with an excellently-written story of alien visitors, and if Boucher's tailpiece seems a bit too much on the side of Catholic proselytism, well, the author is sincere and has come up with an unflinchingly intriguing narrative.

All in all, *New Tales of Time and Space* must rate close to the top anthological achievement of the 1951 science fiction book-publishing list. Furthermore, it is well edited and printed, and employs only a brief introduction and still briefer blurbs before each story to distract the reader from its generally fine fiction content. If you're interested in high-grade new material by some of the ablest authors in the field, you'll be wanting to buy this one. In fact, it's a must.

* * *

SLAN by A. E. van Vogt., Simon & Schuster, New York City (\$2.50).

This is one of the mutant classics. It has been so acclaimed since its first magazine appearance some dozen-odd years ago, first saw hard-cover publi-

cation in an extremely small edition back in 1945, is now finally out for all who wish to purchase or borrow from their local lending library.

The chief visible difference between the slans and more "normal" humans lay in the fact that the mutants had tendrils instead of hair. The invisible differences, however, were far greater. Slans were close to being supermen, with incredible I. Q.'s and all sorts of well-controlled extrasensory talents. They represented in fact a forced evolutionary advance in the species, and as such were feared, hated and reviled by those less gifted than themselves.

This more or less automatic hatred between human and slan seems to us to be the one real weakness in an otherwise generally flawless bit of melodramatic plotting. It is on a par with the automatic and unmotivated dislike between cattleman and nester in so many Western operas, which has served to replace honest human motivation with rubber-stamp likes and hatreds.

On the contrary, and from the records of history, it seems to us far more likely that, come the superman, humanity will welcome him with open arms. Certainly the Mexicans of Montezuma worshipped Cortez as a God until the brutality and rapacity of the conquistadores turned their adoration to loathing. The same was true of the South Sea Islanders in the early days of Western discovery, of impoverished and uneducated natives everywhere. They wish to be delivered from the bondage of their existence, and turn eagerly to any superior type as a means of rescue.

When these so-called superiors turn out to be merely the agents of new and more bitter slavers, then the natives turn on them. But where the motives have been kindly, their early welcome has seldom if ever worn itself out. So, if a truly superior species were

to appear, one which was without cruelty or rapacity, why should people turn against him?

Be that as it may, the adventures of young slan Jimmy Cross make for highly exciting and provocative reading, with plenty of surprises including a real twister at the finish. We can recommend the volume without cavil, are glad to see it at last in wide circulation. The story rates it.

* * *

TOMORROW AND TOMORROW
and THE FAIRY CHESS MEN by
Lewis Padgett, Gnome Press, New
York City (\$2.75).

The two novellas or short novels or whatever that make up this new volume represent two of Mr. Kuttner-Padgett's more closely-worked and ingenious efforts. As has so frequently been the case with Mr. Padgett of recent years, he is intensely preoccupied with abnormal psychology, especially as resulting from the stresses and strains of an atomically imperfect future world resulting more or less directly from the blasts at Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Bikini, Kwajalein, Arizona and the like.

In the first story, a nuclear physicist charged with a vital A-job in a world held in stasis by an all-powerful Global Peace Commission, finds his dreams acting up in a most peculiar disturbing fashion. When he finally visits a physician he can trust, the latter is killed before his eyes by mysterious methods. He has to put a piece together here, add another there, finally discovers he is under the hypnotic control of his own wife, who was seeking a cure for the cancer devouring her body by making contact through a mutant with more highly developed parallel worlds. Needless to say, he has a heck of a time getting himself and all the worlds straightened out.

(Concluded on page 162)

THE READER'S FORUM



IS MONEY EVERYTHING?

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have just read a now-ancient article in *Life*, "Through the Interstellar Looking Glass", and have several questions and comments about same. First, the article refers to AS as second in "intellectual rank" to three other STF mags. Although I am a new fan, and haven't read any of "the aristocrat" mags, I resent that remark. The article also says, "present-day science fiction, except on its lowest levels, is as innocent of sex as a betatron". This is also a fictitious statement. The author couldn't possibly have meant by that that AS is on the lowest levels of STF. One thing wrong with AS and FA, not to mention a dozen or more STF mags, is that they are riddled with sex, and space opera. This is not as much true of the Ziff-Davis mags as it is of some others. I wonder if you, Mr. Browne, really strive to make your mags the highest quality, or if you are just working at your job for your salary? Anyway, I will still remain a loyal fan no matter what you say, if anything.

One thing I think has been uncouthly left out of AS is a continued story. Maybe of short-short length each month. You might be able to get hold of a novel by H. G. Wells and use that.

Why not have a Readers' Favorites page? But if you do adopt this plan, please don't, like *Future*, have a lot of scientific banter messing up the Forum. I like the way you avoid a long novel each month, unlike several other mags. I wish, tho, you wouldn't keep us readers in the dark about such coming attractions; as "Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s great 40,000 word novel". Why not a column of coming events in AS's pages?

Barclay D. Johnson
878 Oak Street
Winnetka, Illinois

Every effort by the editorial staff of both *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures* is toward making them enjoyable to the widest possible readership. Whether that makes them the "highest quality" depends on what you mean by the phrase. One man's "quality" is another man's poison.

—Ed.

SALVO FOR SAUNDERS

Dear Howard:

Just couldn't refrain from complimenting you and artist Norman Saunders on the cover for the January 1951 issue of AS. I consider it one of the better efforts to grace your cover in many a moon. Just out of curiosity, I started leafing back through my files of AS in an effort to find a better cover job. I found nothing I liked better in the last two years. Let's see more of Saunders and less of Jones.

I notice some of your readers are still knocking their heads against stone walls in trying to complete their collections of AS. If anyone is interested, I have a number of back issues of AS, FA, and other science fiction mags to dispose of. All are in good condition and most of the recent issues I'll sell at face value or less. Have quite a few copies of the early Ziff-Davis AS and FA from 1939 through 1943. Any fans interested just drop me a post card and I'll let them know exactly what I have for sale.

Gerry de la Ree
277 Howland Avenue
River Edge, New Jersey

CASE FOR THE PROSECUTION

Dear Editor:

It is not too late. You can still improve *Amazing Stories* and get *Fantastic Adventures* out of the red. Give the readers what they want, and that is the following:

(1) Give those readers who want long novels in *Amazing* and the stories of shorter length leave for *Fantastic*; that was the policy of two, three years ago and I don't know why it won't work out as of now.

(2) Give the readers the ads of future novels that will be printed, long novels. And don't be afraid, which you are, of taking a chance like you did with "So Shall Ye Reap". Two-color ads will do as long as they are full-page-like three years ago.

(3) Take recognition of the letters readers send in and remember that the complaints and letters of bad criticism are for your help and for nothing else. To please the reader will eventually please you.

(4) Get rid of the Club House, which just takes up room, replacing the room for

a long novel. And OTHER FEATURES.

That is what you can do—it is not a command, just a request.

As for your latest issue, the January issue, it was half as good as you were years ago. The story and the length. In the Reader's Forum I read a letter which states that you have never printed a series, and if so the reader was to stop reading AS. Mr. Browne, you had your story published in series form a few years ago, in three parts. Remember "Return of Tharn?" FA too. "The Eye of the World?" This is not a plug for series, just facts.

You can print long novels with the present amount of pages and for this statement I will give you proof and here it is. Remember the long novel "Gods of Venus"—this story ran 87,000 words, but the important fact about it was that it ran only 123 pages; YOU COULD STILL PRINT A NOVEL 100,000 WORDS LONG, PLUS THREE SHORTS WHICH ONLY RAN TO EXACTLY 147 PAGES. With the remainder you could still have the useless Club House and the necessary Reader's Forum, PLUS a minimum in ads. There is your proof and what else could you say but the readers are right and they will get what they want. What is more fair, more democratic? I have given you proof of what you can do to save AS and FA but you still blind the readers and say there is not enough room. The reason AS and FA have dropped in circulation was because they did not contain the long novel any longer. Remember the Brain, that was when you receive a large drop in your circulation and the only explanation which has to be the failure to print the longer novel. The reader that would prefer 50 shorts to one long good novel is rare indeed; for example, do you still hear readers raving about "The Last Spring", "First Rocket" and "Tanya's Night to Howl"? They were all good shorts, but today you never hear a word about them. On the other hand, take "Hidden City", "So Shall Ye Reap", "The Star Kings", "Prometheus II", "Titan's Daughter" and "Gods of Venus". You still get compliments on the long novels but never recurrently on the shorts. They are read faster and forgotten faster. I know that you will not print this letter because it is too long, but just the same I would like to see you take recognition of this letter and really think it over. Thank you.

Would you please let me know if there is a stf club in the City of New York. I would like very much to join the largest.

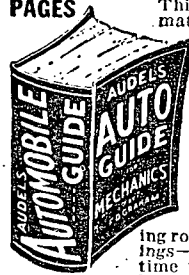
My vote on sexy covers is, make them as sexy as the issue of March 1948.

Thank you for all your trouble you had with all those letters which held only bad criticism. I can't see a great magazine like AS fall.

Edward Joseph McEvoy
5460 43rd Street
Maspeth, New York

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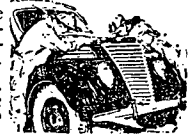
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Reader McEvoy's opinions are his own and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the majority. Nor are many of his assumptions and statements borne out by facts. —Ed.

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have been a stf fan for more years than I care to remember; in fact my reading of science fiction goes back to the old Science and Invention stories of "The Wonderful Adventures of Dr. Hackensaw". I don't think I have missed a copy of either **AMAZING STORIES** or **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES** since their inception. I haunt the magazine stands until each one comes out every month and immediately snatch one and hurry home to eat it up. The only trouble is they do not last long enough.

I like the way the magazines are put together, as far as content goes, that is, I like the illos, especially the covers. You have some fine artists there. These people that gripe about the unclad females on the covers give me a pain. If they would only be honest they would admit they like them, too. I like one long novel, say about 35,000 or 40,000 words, and several shorts. I could get along without the short features but realize a lot of people like them. I wouldn't want to be a hog and say "Take them out". After all, that is what makes a magazine click. It must cater to all preferences. It cannot be bound by what one class of readers enjoys.

I have just read your editorial in "The Observatory" in the January issue. Are you starting another "Shaver" type mystery? If so, please don't let it drop just when things are getting interesting as you did in the Shaver stories. I enjoyed these stories, as fiction, very much. Whether I believed them or not is another matter entirely.

Incidentally, this is a "first letter" for

me to any magazine in all my years of stf reading. I hope I have not bored you.

Wishing you all success in the editing of a truly great magazine and hoping it will be as good in the future as it has in the past.

Allan Glassford
48 Monument Street
Portland, Maine

NEITHER SNOW NOR RAIN NOR HEAT...

Dear Mr. Browne:

I take this opportunity to tell you that, in my opinion, **AMAZING STORIES** is the best that money can buy. I am not new to science fiction. I have been reading science-fiction stories since I was about 12 years old, and I am now 37. For years I read **ASTOUNDING STORIES** and all the others I could get because, although some of the ideas in the stories seem pretty far-fetched, history is proving that a lot of it isn't just fiction. I really enjoy reading science fiction. I have just finished reading "The Last Revolution" in the January 1952 issue of AS. It is very good, but I think that it needs a sequel to tell what happened to Johnny Drayton and Connie after they reached Alpha Centauri. As for long novels, I think that a novel between 40,000 and 60,000 words is plenty long enough. I have done some studying in astronomy and have done a fair amount in observing with a small telescope. Facts about planets, stars, and space travel interest me very much. Keep up the good work on AS because I expect to keep on reading it for a long time. Please don't start any serials, though.

I say again that AS is the best science-fiction magazine I have ever read, and in 25 years I have read a lot of them.

Guy W. Howell, Postmaster
Mannville, Florida

LIFE WITHIN THE CRYSTAL BY JON BARRY

SCIENCE has long sought the missing link between animate and inanimate matter, between the organic and the inorganic. Right now, in a number of laboratories, physicists and biologists are using the electron microscope to peer into the interior of two things which may provide at least a clue to the answer. They are scrutinizing the crystal structure and the virus. It is between these two extremes—and they are not far apart—that the link between life and non-life may be found.

The filterable virus which passes through ceramic pores is little more than a large molecule—yet it lives, ingests food, reproduces, and functions in a manner characteristic of living things. So far as can be

ascertain, the filterable virus (like the Tobacco Mosaic) is essentially, however, a carbon-hydrogen-oxygen creature.

On the other hand, students of the crystal—any kind of crystal, such as quartz, etc.—see in the crystal properties just one step beneath those of the virus, including the faculties of reproduction, growth, and so on. Nevertheless, there is some basic difference between the two. Diffraction and electron microscopes have not yet revealed more than this difference, yet there is strong reason to believe they will. Life—as we know it—seems to be, on Earth, a strictly hydrocarbon matter. Yet, as every s-f reader knows, there seems to be no reason for this. Since crystalline subjects

are rarely hydrocarbonaceous, it seems plausible to seek in them the answer to whether life is or is not restricted to hydrocarbons. Speculators believe that life is a more universal phenomenon than studies of hydrocarbons would allow. This is the basis for the great hope of finding living things on the planets, providing a strong motive for man's desire to strike out from Earth. Even prominent biologists are willing to concede that in the crucibles of life-forming worlds—other planets—it is conceivable that somewhere, sometime, matter may have made the turning and that any element may have become the basis for the strangeness we call "life." This is a concession at least—and perhaps, in the not remote future, the rocketeers will verify it. The "silicon beings" of Mars are likely to be more real than imagination has allowed....

ATOMS HAVE LOOSE HIPPS!

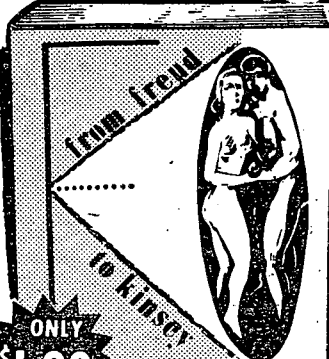
by Walt Crain

THE COMING of color television is changing from a promise to a rich reality. This is a consequence, of course, of the tremendous intensity of applied research. All electronics is constantly in this state of rapid flux by which tomorrow's miracles become today's commonplaces.

The interdependency of research is pointed up particularly well by color television. That marvel requires a high-powered vacuum tube (the most important invention of the twentieth century) capable of operating on a very broad band of frequencies. The invention and design of a particular tube to suit that purpose would be an enormous time-consuming project. But that hasn't been necessary. When the need arose, the tube was already at hand, a perfect example of how one field of science all but anticipates the needs of another field. When it was built, the designers had no idea it would ever be used for anything but what it was intended for—jamming German radars—which it did, effectively.

This "reflex Resnatron", as it is called, is an ingenious arrangement of electronic elements which takes a beam of electrons and whirls them in a vibrating dance at high voltages and higher frequencies. The electrons literally "bunch up", oscillating back and forth and behaving very much like a rumba artist. This analogy isn't as farfetched as it sounds; either, for the electron stream is modulated in just such a weird manner.

This tube will undoubtedly have equally useful roles in the future wherever high-powered tubes are needed—and, judging from the progress made by the things that, genie-fashion, have, so far "come out of the little glass bottle", there will be plenty of them!



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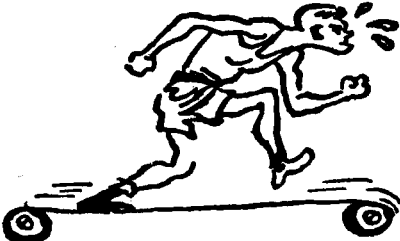
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THE ROADS CAN ROLL! BY A. T. KEDZIE

A FAVORITE point of gadgetry among science fiction authors is the much-debated rubber road, rubber sidewalk, or even rubber city! The attraction of endless belts and moving escalators seems irresistible and many stories have been written around them. But science is slowly catching up with this concept, and before long you may see the wide employment of endless-belt sidewalks as a first step toward solving the "people-moving problem".

For the last twenty years there has been a gradual evolution of methods of material-moving. Grain and sand and ore, for example, in many places do most of their travelling on endless rubber belts. The escalator stairway has taken over the chore of moving large numbers of people short distances vertically. It is not hard to see the utility of a system which never stops, which has a high load-carrying capacity, and which is comparatively cheap.

In other words the moving of things and people on endless rubber belts has been proved practical. Rubber technology has conquered its problem of costs and durability. All that remains is to apply the materials-moving belt on a large scale to "people-moving."

And that is about to be done, New York City is definitely planning to replace a subway shuttle system with some new sys-

tem. Up till now, to go from Grand Central Station to Times Square it has been necessary to board a train shuttle. Rubber engineers have suggested that the only logical replacement is an endless rubber belt, guarded and protected, moving slowly—yet rapidly enough—with small carriages and seats fastened to the top of the belt. The shuttle belt will move at a speed of perhaps twenty miles an hour—never stopping, never slowing down. People will board and step off the belt by means of an auxiliary belt running at perhaps half that speed, so that at no time will people have to worry about speed changes greater than ten miles an hour. If necessary, still a third belt could be used, to bring the speed change to a mere five miles per hour, an ordinary walk.

The advantages of all of these proposals are clear when you realize that moving things in bits and starts involves loss of time and energy, and the core and secret of the whole business of moving things is the never-stopping, never-slowng, continual-motion method.

Everyone, engineer as well as science fictionist, is watching this new development anxiously—it is still only a proposal—for it can mean a complete change of transportation methods in our time!

★ ★ ★



YOU WON'T BELIEVE THIS!

BY JUNE LURIE

"ELMER" AND "ELSIE" are the famous robotic creations of a British neurologist who startled the world about a year ago by constructing two three-wheeled turtle-shaped mechanical animals endowed with the singular ability of sensing food (light) and attaining that food

by rolling to it on wheels. These ingenious creations, supplied with the most rudimentary of mechanical brains (two tubes), were a maze of circuitry and relays. The astonishing thing, however, was that they behaved, within the scope of their abilities, like live animals.

Now Dr. Walter has done the thing up even more elaborately, allways with the intention of learning more of mental processes. He has endowed his creatures with an eight-tube brain and the faculty of elementary memory. The memory functioning is identical with the familiar "conditioned reflex" of psychology, wherein one stimulant is substituted for another after a period of training. Remember Pavlov's famous experiments with the dogs, in which the ringing of a bell could induce the animals to salivate even though no food were present? Similarly Dr. Walter has brought

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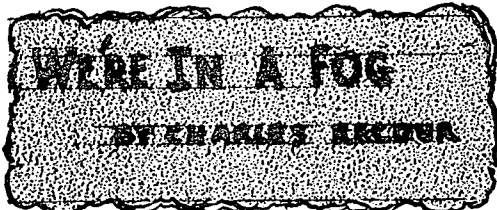
his mechanical animals to this stage. They are no longer sensitive only to light, however.

Now a sonic mechanism has been incorporated and, upon the blowing of a whistle, the creatures will move toward a light source just as though their photo-electric eyes had seen it! These miraculous accomplishments suggest a world of fantastic scientific possibilities.

Perhaps the grimmest and most ominous note in the whole scheme is that the neurologist has so amplified the "brain" structure of the robots they can react in either of two ways to the same stimulus. Thus the sound of a whistle might make them both want light and be repelled by it. This, essentially, is a built-in neurotic mechanism!

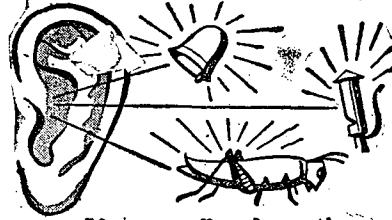
When such a problem is presented to the animals (it's hard to think of them as machines), they react precisely as do human beings who are beset by indecision and hesitancy. They simply cower in motionlessness, their "brains" frantically endeavoring to decide which way to behave. This state of feverish inaction lasts until the memory control (a matter of seconds) stops operating or until Dr. Walter throws the switch of "sleep".

Unfortunately, the human cure for an emotional stalemate isn't as simple as turning or flicking a switch. The success of the neurologist's work with these elementary robotic structures is certainly encouraging, however, to the general world of cybernetics and it is all part and parcel of the gradual mechanization of the basic thinking processes. Perhaps the day will come when all signs will read "Humans wanted—only geniuses need apply"!



IT'S NOT bad enough that astronomers have to contend with the terrific blanket of light-interfering air that surrounds Earth. While nothing hampers astronomical observation as much, there is a remedy for it—get out into space and put your 'scopes on the Moon! But more and more evidence—the journals are simply crammed with these reports—shows that our galaxy is literally wandering around in a fog! Interstellar space, which we've always thought of as barren and empty, is, on the contrary jammed to the ears with cosmic detritus and debris—so much, in fact, that astronomers are only beginning to realize that they see just about one-half or one-quarter of what they should be able to see. Dust, gas, small particles—these things cut down and scatter light from stars until the over-all effect of peering into the

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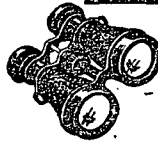
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stellar system is reminiscent of looking into a store window through fly-specked glass! It's just that bad.

There is no easy remedy for this, however. You can't sweep the universe clean. There is no cosmological broom that can clear space of these noxious clouds.

The one apparatus that helps to overcome this handicap is radio—and it is through this device that most knowledge has been gleaned about the dust clouds. Radio waves, whose wave-lengths are long compared with infrared, ultraviolet or ordinary light, literally go "around" the interfering particles. Fortunately the stars are good broadcasters and our receiving equipment is getting better all the time. Through this medium we are learning a great deal about the thick, pea-soupy fog enveloping the galaxy.

If the fog were not there, the night sky would be incredibly brilliant and millions of stars now invisible to the naked eye would be as clear as the Pole Star. In fact the sky would present a picture we can't even imagine, a picture which even outer space would not supply. But this is one vision we won't see, even if we do reach the stars—the fog is all around us!

WHOSE SEA IS IT?

BY LEE OWEN

AN INTERESTING little event occurred in Congress recently, an event whose significance escaped the vast bulk of people whom eventually it will concern. The event was this: The Supreme Court ruled that the tidelands, for a distance of three miles from the coastlines of the respective states, belong to the states! That innocently deceptive statement is highly important to the future technology of the country—and the world—for it concerns the infinite riches buried in the sea. All this came about in a very simple way.

During the last ten years or so oil-drilling actually began to go out to sea, erecting the drilling apparatus on barges and pumping vast quantities of oil from oil domes buried beneath the sea. The Federal Government saw this lucrative operation and, under wartime stress, seized control of it. The states fought the matter bitterly, and, as a result, the tidelands which cover the water-edges of the states bordering the coast are now State property and can be treated more effectively.

The coastlines of the country are basically shallow waters under which a wealth of mineral resources exist. And it is technologically feasible to recover this wealth, whereas going far out into the ocean has thus far proved impracticable. But oil-drilling is only a beginning. Eventually mines rich in copper or iron or other metals will be tackled—the sea is providing magnesium now! Bromine comes from the

sea, and biologists assure us that much sea food of the plant variety is edible. All of these things mean that the sea is going to be a future reservoir of incredible wealth, wealth of the most realistic and tangible variety.

Submarine mining may eventually vie in importance with land-locked subterranean work. As mineral deposits are exhausted on land, men reach out their technological fingers into the sea, greedily drawing upon a truly inexhaustible source. The mineral wealth in and beneath the sea is simply without end!

HOW SMALL CAN YOU GET?

BY SALEM LANE

ON A MACROSCOPIC or Brobdiagnagian scale, about the longest time interval that can be conceived of, is the age of the Universe. How many countless billions of years did this formation take? Even time interpreted in terms of light beams shooting across the island universes seems incredibly long. For that matter the slow revolution of Pluto about our Sun seems like a great deal of time and anyone sitting on a hot stove (to quote that classic of relativity) knows how long time can seem.

But what about the other end of the scale, the microscopic or Lilliputian size of things? What are short intervals? To get an answer, the second has to be split and the most natural place to look for this microscopic division is in the smallest things, in atoms and in atomic nuclei. Here events endure or occur in intervals figured in millionths and billionths of a second. A recent marvel to come from the physics laboratories is a scintillation counting gadget which can capture atomic or sub-atomic happenings of the order of a billionth of a second! An atom explodes in that short a time and fluorescent screen detects the minute explosion and records it. So far this billionth of a second probably represents the extreme limit that Man has gone to in fine measures of time.

But very little is known of the atomic core or kernel itself. What reactions occur here? It is imaginable that a billionth of a second is an eternity in terms of how rapidly things happen. Perhaps time as we know it has no meaning whatsoever, yet this is hardly likely since we determined the order of events by time—or rather vice versa. Even in the atomic world everything can't happen at once—or not at all. The problem of sub-atomic time evolves into a complex philosophical debate but you can be perfectly sure that physics will eventually get down to the limits. It may be a billionth of a second now—but before long it will be a thousandth and then a millionth of that!

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(Concluded from page 153)

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(Concluded from page 2)

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